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HERBERT MANNERS

AND OTHER STORIES

FLORENCE MONTGOMERY



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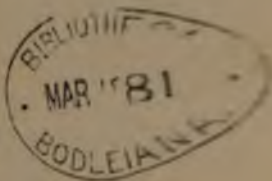


MANNERS.

ES.

MONTGOMERY,

UNDERSTOOD.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1880.

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HERBERT MANNERS.

AND OTHER TALES.

BY
FLORENCE MONTGOMERY,
AUTHOR OF 'MISUNDERSTOOD.'



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HERBERT MANNERS.



CHAPTER I.

‘I THINK I know it now,’ said Herbert Manners, jumping up from the rug, on which he had been lying full-length, with the book he was studying open on the ground, his head propped up by his hands and elbows, and his heels in the air ; ‘I think I have got it quite perfect at last.’

So saying, he handed the book to his mother, who was sitting close by, working, and asked her to hear him say what he had been learning.

I dare say my readers will imagine it was some very difficult lesson Herbert was about to repeat, a stiff bit of history, perhaps, with quantities of dates ; or Betts’ geography, with its strings of names ; or French grammar, with examples and exceptions.

But no ; it was nothing of all that. Neither was it spelling, nor arithmetic, nor Latin. Nothing of the kind.

Now do try and guess what it was ! Nothing

more than his part in 'Beauty and the Beast,' which he was hoping soon to act at his grandfather's.

There was always a grand gathering of uncles and aunts and cousins at his grandfather's every Christmas, and as a rule Herbert and his mother and brother were always of the party.

But it had so happened this year that Herbert's little brother Percy had had a bad attack of inflammation of the lungs, and therefore it had been impossible for him to go, and equally impossible for his mother to leave him.

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Manners had proposed to Herbert to go alone ; but Herbert had totally declined to do so. Much as he wished to go, and disappointed as he was to miss the usual happy party, nothing would persuade him to leave his mother on Christmas Day. And so they had all three stayed at home.

They had had a very cosy Christmas dinner in little Percy's room ; and after dinner they had had a tree and a bran-pie ; and it had turned out a most successful evening.

But after Christmas Day was over, Mrs. Manners had tried to persuade Herbert to go to his grandfather's for the new year's festivities. There was to be acting and tableaux vivants, and he would be much wanted ; for he was a good hand at acting, and was not a bit shy of speaking out his part clearly and well.

At first Herbert had demurred, but in the end, when his mother had convinced him that it would

really give her more pleasure if he went than if he stayed, he had consented.

This is why we find him with his book on the floor and his heels in the air ; for no sooner had he made up his mind to go, than he began to look forward to the idea with the greatest delight, and set to work to learn his part with all his might.

From all that we have so far said of Herbert Manners, I think my readers will gather that he was a very nice boy, a good son, a kind little elder brother ; affectionate, considerate, and full of kind and unselfish impulses.

And so he was. He was all this, and more ; but he had his faults, and his faults were such as did not show so much at home as when he mixed with other children, who were more of his own age, and whose wishes and interests clashed more with his than did those of his mother and little brother.

One of Herbert's greatest failings was a desire to be first. Whatever the game, he liked to be the head of it. If he played at soldiers he must be the general ; if he acted, he must have the best part.

In his own home he was so circumstanced that he generally had things pretty much his own way. His brother Percy was a good deal younger than him, and therefore naturally Herbert took the lead, and Percy was quite contented to follow. Herbert did everything, of course, a little better than Percy, and Percy thought him a very fine fellow, and was always willing to be taught by him and to take his advice.

Then, his mother being a widow, Herbert had her more to himself than is the case with most boys ; and she was able to give more time to him, and to his interests and pleasures, than many mothers can.

So that altogether Herbert got more attention and consideration than was perhaps quite good for him. And his mother, who was quite aware of his failings, liked him to mix with other children, so that he might get a little more put on one side and contradicted and knocked about than he could be at home with only her and Percy. She did not think it good for him to be always in an atmosphere where he had so few temptations. She thought he hardly knew how much he stood in need of learning self-control. She knew he had rather a violent temper, though he seldom showed it at home, and certainly never to *her* ; but still, there it was, and she was most anxious he should learn to control it before he went to school.

Of course, if things always went right, and everything happened exactly as we liked, we should none of us, I suppose, ever get cross, or angry, or put out. Where there is no enemy there is no battle ; but where there is no battle there is no victory. The grandest thing is to be tempted, and to resist, and to conquer.

And in the society of children of his own age, Mrs. Manners felt Herbert would have to learn to give and take, and to yield up his will to that of others, and to do what he did not like sometimes without losing his temper.

'Which part did you say you were to have, dear?' she asked, as she took the book from Herbert's hand.

'Uncle Claud did not say,' he answered; 'but of course it will be the Beast; so I have learnt that.'

'But why *of course*?' she said; 'the Beast is one of the principal parts.'

'And I am one of the principal actors,' he said quickly.

His mother raised her eyebrows, and looked at him with a quiet smile.

Herbert knew what she meant, and felt a little shy.

'Well, mamma,' he said, with a slight blush, 'I don't want to boast. It isn't that. But you know as well as I do that Harry never will speak out, and Dick always laughs the moment he comes on the stage, and Neville turns his back to the audience, and Johnny forgets his part, and has to be poked and pushed, and prompted so loud, that it quite spoils the effect of the play.'

'And what about Jem?' she inquired, quietly.'

'Ah well,' said Herbert, rather bored, 'Jem acts all right; but then, mother, he is younger than me, and I do think I ought to have the choice.'

'But I don't think it is a question of choice at all. I think you will find your Uncle Claud will settle everything. Is he not the stage-manager?'

'Yes, mamma, but still——'

'But still what?'

'I mean, I think I *ought* to have a choice, because——'

‘Tell me your reasons, dear. What makes you think that you, more than Jem, should have the best and favourite part?’

‘Well, mamma, first because, as I said just now, I am the eldest.’

‘How much?’ she interrupted, with a smile. ‘Only a month or two, I think.’

‘Two whole months,’ he answered eagerly, ‘a week and three days. Jem and I have often counted it up together.’

‘Two whole months,’ she repeated, ‘a week and three days older than Jem. Reason first. Is that the best you have to give?’

‘Ah, now you are laughing at me, mamma!’ exclaimed Herbert.

He could not bear being turned into ridicule, especially by his mother.

‘I am quite grave,’ she answered. ‘Go on to the next reason.’

‘Well, then, it would be rather hard not to let me have the part, when I’ve been working so hard at learning it, and taking so much trouble to get it perfect. Why, mamma,’ he went on, quite affected at his description of his labours, ‘do you know, I have spent the last hours of daylight this afternoon in learning it, when I might have been reading the new book you gave me on Christmas Day!’

‘Poor boy!’ she said, smiling again.

Herbert saw the smile, and looked rather offended.

‘Well, then,’ he went on, more eager than ever to

prove his case, as he saw he was not altogether convincing his mother, 'then I've got that beautiful tiger-skin Uncle Herbert sent home. It would be the very thing for the Beast. It would be a thousand pities not to use it. Why, I dressed myself up in it this morning, and frightened the housemaid nearly into a fit by popping out behind the cupboard on the stairs. She quite screamed ; she did indeed, mother ; and she declared afterwards that she had thought it was a real tiger, and that she had never been so frightened in all her life !'

'I don't wonder,' said Mrs. Manners. 'It must have been most alarming. And I am truly grateful to you for not trying the experiment on me.'

'But still, mamma, it just shows !'

'Just shows ?' repeated Mrs. Manners, inquiringly. 'What does it show ?'

'Well, shows—I mean—what a capital wild-beast's skin it is.'

'I never doubted that for a moment,' she answered ; 'and it is not so very surprising, considering it is a real skin. But I don't see that that is any reason for your acting the Beast.'

'Why, mother dear ! don't you see that it would be a thousand pities not to use such a capital skin.'

'But,' she rejoined, 'whether you take the part or Jem, the skin will do equally well. Of course you can lend it to him.'

Herbert's face grew very long, and he answered hastily :

‘That would never do. It wouldn’t fit.’

The next moment he would have given a great deal not to have said such a foolish thing; for his mother laughed merrily.

‘And does it fit you, dear?’ she said. ‘Were you measured for it? Does it fit in every part, face and all? And how about your tail?’

‘Of course, mamma,’ he answered, laughing a little, but not willingly, ‘of course I didn’t mean that. But it really requires a great deal of care to stuff it out right, and make it look as if it fitted.’

‘And how did you manage it?’ she asked.

‘I was stuffed out,’ he answered, ‘with two cushions, and some sand-bags, and a shirt or two.’

‘And couldn’t Jem be stuffed out with two cushions, and some sand-bags, and a shirt or two?’

‘No,’ said Herbert, decidedly; ‘he could not bear it. He would find it so dreadfully hot and stuffy. Even I could hardly breathe. Besides,’ added Herbert slowly, ‘I should be afraid of the skin getting spoilt; and it’s mine.’

‘Is it?’ said Mrs. Herbert. ‘How very odd! Do you know, I thought it was mine. Surely your Uncle Herbert sent it to me?’

‘Well, I mean it’s mine because it’s yours. At any rate, it isn’t Jem’s. The truth is, mamma, I don’t want to lend it to him, because I want to be the Beast myself.’

‘Ah, we’ve got to the true reason at last!’ said his mother. ‘I am glad you have owned it to your-

self. All your other reasons were mere excuses. Now were they not, Herbert? Answer me honestly.'

'Well, yes,' said Herbert slowly; 'I suppose they were.'

'Jim being younger, your labours in learning your part, and all your objections to his having the tiger-skin—all three reasons were no reasons at all,' said Mrs. Manners; 'and so we return to the point we started from, and that was that you felt sure you were to have the Beast's part, and that I did not feel at all sure about it. And I most strongly advise you not only not to set your heart upon it, but to learn one or two of the other parts as well, so as to be ready for whatever turns up, and to be prepared in case the Beast's part is given to Jem.'

But this Herbert would not hear of doing.

'He was quite—quite sure,' he said, 'that Uncle Claud would assign the Beast's part to him. And if not, he would not act at all. He should not care the least for any other part in the play.'

His mother said no more. She knew that boys sometimes learn more, though more roughly, from friction with other boys than from their mother's teaching, and so she thought she would leave him to buy his own experience.

She therefore merely heard him repeat the part, and pointed out a few bits which would be improved by a little more learning.

And then she went up to little Percy, leaving Herbert sitting somewhat moodily by the fire, with 'Beauty and the Beast' in his lap.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT six o'clock the next evening, Herbert Manners, his heart beating high with pleasure and excitement, was driving up to his uncle's house in the carriage which had been sent to meet him at the station.

Notwithstanding his delight, however, he was feeling a little shy, for he had never in his life paid a visit without his mother before, and he did not quite know how he should feel alone among his uncles and aunts and cousins.

The carriage stopped at the lodge-gate, and the gardener's wife came out to open it, a pretty little girl of about six trotting out after her. The gardener's wife was a very old friend of Herbert's; she had known him ever since he was born.

'A happy New Year to you, Master Manners!' she called out, as the carriage drove by. 'And how's your dear mamma and Master Percy?'

Herbert had not time to answer, but he leant out of the window as far as he could, and waved his handkerchief.

'How the little thing has grown,' he said to himself; 'and how pretty she looks!'

The little girl was an orphan grandchild of the gardener's, and had been such a pretty baby that she had gone by the name of 'the little beauty.'

The gardener and his wife had been so proud of her that they had always spoken of her as 'our

little beauty,' and the name had stuck to her, so that she had come at last to be always called 'Beauty' by everyone.

'How jolly it looks!' said Herbert to himself, as he leaned out of the window to catch the first sight of the old house towards which he was being rapidly driven.

Very jolly it certainly looked, standing out in the clear starlight, with lights in all its windows. It was the very picture of warmth and comfort and hospitality.

The carriage drew up at the hall-door, and the footman rang a tremendous peal at the bell.

At almost the same moment was heard from within a rush of eager feet and a sound of merry voices.

The door was flung open, and as Herbert stepped into the house, he was instantly surrounded by a crowd of cousins—boys and girls of all ages and sizes—all talking at once, all trying to shake hands with him, and all telling him something different at the same moment.

'Come! leave him alone!' said a loud authoritative voice; 'don't tear the poor fellow to pieces. Stand back, some of you, and let him come to the fire and warm himself after his cold journey.'

'Uncle Claud!' exclaimed Herbert, springing joyfully forward, while the rest, falling back at once, made room for him to advance and take his uncle's outstretched hand.

Uncle Claud's word was law. He was the

youngest and only unmarried uncle, and an immense favourite with all the children.

‘How are you, my boy?’ he said; ‘and how did you leave your mother? Come along with me into the drawing-room, and pay your respects to your elders and betters. You can attend to this noisy crew afterwards.’

So saying, he led him into the drawing-room, where he was warmly received by the divers uncles and aunts who were there assembled, and by his grandfather, a fine-looking old gentleman, who kissed him affectionately, and told him he grew more like his dear mother every day.

These greetings were hardly over before there came a chorus from the hall of, ‘Tea is ready! tea is ready!’ and the next moment the rest of the children burst into the room.

Harry, Dick, Neville, Jem, and Johnny sprang upon Herbert, and a terrific romp seemed likely to ensue.

But Uncle Claud’s voice rose above the uproar: ‘Be off! be off! No bear-fighting here, boys. This is the drawing-room remember.’

I said just now that Uncle Claud was a general favourite with all the children. And so he was. But they were also rather afraid of him.

He was a man who would not stand any nonsense.

He was at once the promoter of all the fun at these Christmas gatherings, the settler of all disputes, and the uncompromising law-maker.

Very just, but very firm, some children would have called him strict. But indeed it was neces-

sary to be rather firm with such a rabble of noisy children—mixed families too. For, as I dare say you know a flock of cousins is much more difficult to keep in order than a flock of brothers and sisters. They are much more noisy and unmanageable, and excite each other a great deal more.

In their games, too, Uncle Claud kept order. He insisted upon everyone taking turns properly, and playing the game as it ought to be played. No one was ever allowed to play unfairly, or to get out of doing what he did not care to do, if it fell to his share.

There was nothing Uncle Claud was more strict about, too, than if they acted, they should go through their parts properly and do their very best.

Anyone who undertook to act, and then when his turn came to go on, turned shy and refused, never heard the last of it from Uncle Claud.

‘No one need act at all unless they like,’ he would say ; ‘but anyone who undertakes to do so must go through his part like a man. I will have no shirking at the last, and spoiling the pleasure of the rest.’

He was very strict, too, about giggling, or speaking so that no one could hear. He did not mind these things in a beginner, or in a very young child, or perhaps at the first rehearsal ; but he would not stand it on the grand night, or in those who had acted before, or were old enough to be more sensible.

‘Either do a thing well, or don’t do it at all,’ he would say.

Herbert’s acting always met with Uncle Claud’s

approval. He knew the boy put his whole heart into his part, and did his very best.

And knowing this was perhaps the reason why Herbert felt secretly convinced that the Beast part was almost certain to be given to him.

Laughing, wrestling, and jostling, the children all scrambled out of the drawing-room and went into the school-room to tea.

Herbert's place was between Neville and Jem ; and hardly were they all seated than he turned eagerly to Jem and asked him if the parts were settled for 'Beauty and the Beast.'

'Hush!' said Jem ; 'you mustn't talk about it now. Half of them don't know we are going to act, and Uncle Claud wants it kept a secret till the day comes. He's going to give us all sorts of surprises, too, when the play is over.'

'But how are we to learn our parts, and how are we to rehearse?' exclaimed Herbert.

'Oh, that is all to be done to-morrow morning,' answered Jem ; 'at least, we are to learn our parts in the morning and rehearse in the afternoon. They're quite easy to learn, you know, all in rhyme. It won't take us more than an hour or so. It's quite A B C. Directly after breakfast to-morrow, Uncle Claud is to call all he has picked out to act into the play-room ; the doors are to be locked, and then Uncle Claud will settle all the parts himself, so that there shall be no quarrelling or grumbling. So we shan't know till to-morrow. Do you see?'

'Oh dear!' exclaimed Herbert; 'what a bore! I *did* so want to know all about it at once.'

'Oh, what's the good!' laughed Jem; 'we've got all sorts of other fun for to-night.'

'Have we?' exclaimed Herbert; 'what are we going to have? Not a tree, I suppose?'

'No; the tree is over,' said Jem; 'we had that on Christmas Eve, and a bran-pie on Christmas night. It's a pity you missed all that. But your presents were sent to you, weren't they?'

'Yes,' answered Herbert; 'we had them on our own tree in Percy's room. But tell me, what are we going to do to-night?'

'To-night,' answered Jem, 'is more particularly for the little ones, who are supposed to be too young to care about looking on at the acting to-morrow. Uncle Claud is going to show them a magic-lantern, and then they are to dance.'

Soon after this conversation, tea came to an end; and the whole party trooped off to wash and dress for the evening.

Herbert's room was next to the nursery where Jem's sisters and their nursery-maid were; and the latter came and offered to give him any help he might require.

But Herbert was a helpful independent sort of boy, and he rather liked packing and unpacking and arranging his clothes.

As he got ready, his head was very full of the old subject. He felt on the whole pretty well satisfied that Uncle Claud would give him the Beast's

part, but still he wished he knew it for certain, and he longed for the moment when Uncle Claud should call them all into the play-room, and put him out of his suspense.

‘I wish this evening was over,’ he sighed, as he washed his hands.

The next moment he reproached himself for his selfishness in wanting the younger children’s fun to be over ; and he determined not to think any more of himself and his own desires, but to devote himself entirely to helping to amuse the little ones, and make their evening go off well.

Full of these good resolutions, he ran downstairs, and more than ever reproached himself for his momentary wish, when he saw the flutter of delight and excitement among the small children, who were all assembled in the hall. These all had seats immediately in front of the magic lantern ; the bigger ones were behind, and behind them again the grown-up people. Then came the servants, and the gardeners and their wives, and other people about the place. Among these Herbert soon espied the little girl from the lodge and her grand-parents, and at his earnest entreaty he was allowed to bring the child from behind, where she was not in a good place for seeing, and to establish her near the other children in front.

Little Beauty was rather shy in her new position, and clung tightly to Herbert’s hand. Finding this, he sat down in her chair and took her in his lap. Herbert was very fond of little girls. He had once

had a dear little sister, who had died when she was about Beauty's age; and, though it was many years ago, he still remembered her fondly, and loved all little girls for her sake.

Beauty was quite happy with Herbert's protecting arm round her, and soon forgot she had left her grandmother a good way off. But she clung tightly to his hand every now and then, when anything of a bear or lion, or a particularly ugly old man, appeared upon the sheet.

7 When the performance was over, he took her back to her grandmother, who overwhelmed him with grateful thanks for his kindness to the child, and begged him to come and pay her and Beauty a visit at the lodge whenever he could find time, which Herbert gladly promised to do.

The seats were now all cleared away, the magic lantern and sheet disappeared, and the hall was lighted up from one end to another.

The mechanical organ was brought in, and the bigger boys turned the handle one after another, while the little ones danced. At least they called it dancing, but it was really only jumping and running. However, *they* enjoyed it very much, and occasionally they tumbled down and rolled over each other, which they enjoyed even more.

Afterwards came 'Grand Mufti,' 'Blind Man's Buff,' and other games of the same kind.

Herbert was thoroughly tired-out when the evening was over, and was not at all sorry to find himself in his bedroom.

But, sleepy as he was, he managed to scribble a few lines to his mother, who would, he knew, be longing to hear how he was getting on.

CHAPTER III.

‘AT last the day has come,’ said Herbert to himself, as he jumped out of bed the next morning.

He met Neville and Harry in the passage outside, and together they all proceeded downstairs.

They found Jem and Dick and Lotty (Dick’s sister) and several others, all standing round the fire in the hall, talking eagerly.

‘Here’s a go!’ shouted Dick, as they approached.

‘What? what?’ said Herbert and Neville together quickly.

‘What’s to be done now?’ said Dick; ‘here’s Uncle Claud been telegraphed for to London on business, and can’t get back till six o’clock this evening.’

‘Only just in time for the full dress rehearsal,’ put in Lotty; ‘and we’ve got to settle everything and arrange everything by ourselves.’

There was a general exclamation of disgust from everybody.

‘But can’t we get hold of him before he starts?’ exclaimed Herbert, eagerly. ‘Just to ask him to settle about the parts?’

‘Before he starts?’ echoed Dick. ‘Why, he’s

gone! He's been gone ten minutes, at least. He went off by the early train.'

Herbert's face grew very long, and an expression of great anxiety came over it.

'What *is* to be done?' he exclaimed. 'Who *is* to settle about the parts?'

'Didn't he leave word with anybody?' inquired Neville. 'Did no one see him before he started?'

'He was in a tremendous hurry,' answered Lotty, 'and hadn't time to settle anything. All he said was that we must arrange it all ourselves, and that he would have a full-dress rehearsal directly he came back this evening.'

'Did you see him yourself?' inquired Harry.

'No,' she answered; 'I wasn't down—but Lily and Mabel did.'

Lily and Mabel were Jem's sisters. They instantly became great people in the general estimation. They had seen the last of Uncle Claud, and surely he must have said *something* more, have left some message, or given some parting directions.

'What did he say, exactly? Try and remember every word,' said Dick; and he, Herbert, Neville, and Harry crowded eagerly round the two little girls.

'He said,' answered Lily, 'that we were to settle it our own way, and try and give the parts to those who were most likely to do them best; and that we were to be sure not to quarrel over it.'

'That's all very well,' laughed Neville, 'but we're sure to quarrel over it if it's left to us. We shall each want the best part, I know.'

'Wasn't there anything else, Lily? Are you sure you can't remember anything else?'

'No; that's all I remember,' said Lily; 'perhaps Mabel may.'

Everybody turned to Mabel, and entreated her to try and remember something.

'He said Lotty was to be Beauty, because she was the tallest,' said Mabel, 'and——'

'And who did he say was to be the Beast?' cried Herbert, Dick, Harry, Johnny, and Neville, all together.

'He didn't say,' answered Mabel. 'What he said was this: "The boys must settle it between them about their parts, but Lotty must be Beauty, because she's taller than either of you." That's all he said.'

'What a bore!' exclaimed Dick. 'I am sure we shall never be able to settle. What are we to do?'

'Well, if the tallest girl is to be Beauty, the tallest boy ought to be the beast,' said Jem, who had not yet spoken, 'and that would leave it to Neville.'

'I don't see that,' said Herbert, quickly; 'it doesn't the least matter for the Beast. He's on all fours.'

'Not all the time,' said Neville; 'is he on fours when he's the Prince, pray?'

The rest laughed a little at the idea of a Prince on all fours; and Herbert, who could not bear being laughed at, got rather red, and felt his temper rising.

He managed, however, to keep it down, and listened eagerly for what would come next.

'*I think,*' said Harry, 'that whoever acts Beauty should choose the Beast; she's got to marry him in the end, and so she ought to have some choice in the matter.'

'That's nonsense,' said Herbert, breaking in hastily. He knew that Harry was Lotty's favourite cousin, and felt sure therefore that her choice would fall upon him. 'That's nonsense. Lotty was ill last Christmas, and didn't see us act; so she doesn't the least know how we each act, nor which is most fit for the part; and Uncle Claud said we were to try to give the parts to those who were most likely to do them best. Didn't he, Lily? Haven't you just said so?'

Lily admitted that it was quite true.

'And if Lotty chose,' Herbert went on eagerly, 'she might choose the very one of us who would act the Beast worst.'

'Well, then, how *are* we to settle?' exclaimed Harry and Neville both at once.

'Let *me* arrange it,' said Herbert. 'I know exactly how each one of us acts.'

'Well,' said Neville, 'you can try, only you mustn't go and take the best part for yourself.'

'Why not?' said Herbert, his temper again rising. 'I've just as good a right to the best part as anybody else.'

'That may be,' answered Neville; 'but I thought

you said we were to try and give the best part to the one who would act it the best.'

'And if I did,' said Herbert, 'I say I could act it as well as you, and better. I never turn my back to the audience like you——'

'Who says I turn my back to the audience?' said Neville, angrily.

'You know you do,' answered Herbert; 'everybody knows you do. Why, last year, just at the prime moment, you turned your back, and no one could hear a word you said.'

'I didn't!' shouted Neville.

'You did,' answered Herbert.

'You shut up,' said Neville, advancing with no very friendly air towards Herbert; but Mabel caught hold of him and pulled him back.

'Oh now, *don't* begin to quarrel!' she exclaimed. 'Never mind it now. Let's come to breakfast and talk about it afterwards.'

At the same moment the schoolroom gong sounded, and the children all hurried off.

Happily for all parties, there had been a heavy fall of snow during the night; and the temptation to have a grand snow-balling match in the park was too great to be resisted. So, of their own accord, the children all decided to leave the question of the play till after luncheon, and to devote the morning to out-door amusement. The prospect of building a gigantic snow-man, to frighten everybody who came by, for the moment drove every other thought out of their heads. Herbert and

Neville became friends again in the excitement of making it, and soon forgot their little huff of the morning.

The snow-man was an awful creature ; certainly very tall, very fat, and the most hideous expression of countenance you ever beheld. He was crowned with a wreath of holly, made by the girls; and some of the younger children were afraid to go near him when he was finished.

The boys were most unwilling to leave him, when the time came to go in to luncheon.

The question of the play now became uppermost again, and directly after luncheon Herbert, Neville, Jem, Harry, Dick, Johnny, Lotty, Lilly, and Mabel retired to the play-room, and the argument was at once resumed.

CHAPTER IV.

‘It seems to me,’ said Lotty, ‘that as both Herbert and Neville are so bent upon being the Beast, they had better draw lots, and settle it that way.’

‘Oh! but I want to be Beast just as much as they do,’ said Harry.

‘And so do I,’ said Johnny.

‘And so do I,’ said Dick.

‘Five Beasts!’ exclaimed Lotty in despair; ‘what is to be done? Why, there’s only Jem left for all the other parts.’

'Suppose we all choose our parts according to our ages,' said Dick, who was nearly eleven.

'No ; according to our heights,' said Neville, who was taller than any of his cousins.

'Look here,' said Lily, 'Dick's the eldest and Neville's the tallest. It lies between the two. Let them draw lots for it. Or stop ! to save trouble, I'll say, "Hickory, dickeroy, dock"——'

'This is all nonsense,' burst out Herbert, who had been trying hard for some minutes to keep down the agitation into which listening to this discussion had thrown him. 'If it lies between any two of us, it lies between me and Jem. And Uncle Claud would say the same if he were here.'

'Between you and Jem,' repeated Neville, Harry, Dick, and Johnny ; 'and why, pray ?'

'Because,' said Herbert, 'we are the two best actors, and you all know we are !'

This announcement was received with great indignation, and cries of 'Who says so ?' 'Your trumpeter's dead !' and 'Well, you are a brag !' etc.

'Speak for yourself,' said Jem. 'I never said I was one of the best actors.'

'You shouldn't boast, Herbert,' said Lotty, gravely.

'It isn't boasting,' said Herbert ; 'it's truth.'

'Well, then, all I can say is,' said Neville, who had not at all forgiven Herbert for saying he turned his back to the audience, 'all I can say is, that if it lies between you and Jem, I say, give the part to Jem !'

'And I'—'And I,' said the others.

'Jem never boasts,' said Lily; 'so I say give it to Jem too.'

'As far as I am concerned,' said Jem, when the noise had a little subsided, 'I'd just as soon be the King. I don't care about the Beast part so very particularly, as everybody seems to want it so much.'

'There now,' said Herbert, rushing forward, 'you hear what he says. He won't have the part; and so, as it lies between us two, it leaves it to me. You can't any of you say a word now.'

'But we can!' shouted several of them, for Herbert had sunk very much in everybody's opinion, owing to his intemperate language and behaviour.

'I'd sooner *anyone* had the part than you,' said Neville.

'Then it's very unkind of you,' said Herbert, and he felt the tears rushing to his eyes, but forced them hastily back.

'Unkind!' repeated Harry. 'I don't think you've much to say about unkindness. It was very unkind of you to say Neville turned his back to the audience. You knew quite well how much he would dislike your saying so.'

'And I say,' exclaimed Neville, encouraged by Harry's taking his part; 'I say that Harry would act the Beast much better than you.'

'*Harry?*' almost shouted Herbert.

'Yes, Harry,' repeated Neville, who saw Herbert was getting into a passion, and who therefore be-

came all the more provoking. 'I say Harry, or Dick or Johnny, any one of them shall have the part before you, if I have any voice in the matter. And I believe, too,' he went on, 'that any of them would act it better than you.'

Herbert struggled hard to control himself. His eyes flashed and he clenched his hands together. But he did not succeed. He burst out, hardly knowing what he said.

'Harry do it better than me!' he cried in a loud, angry tone. '*Dick* do it better than me! Johnny do it better than me! What are you talking about? What do you mean? Why Harry never speaks above a whisper! Dick giggles from the moment he comes on the stage till the moment he goes off it. Johnny forgets every word he is going to say, and spoils the whole thing by making the prompter's voice heard above everything. A nice play you'll have if you make any of them the Beast, indeed! A pretty play, certainly!'

He stopped for a minute, breathless with passion, and then went on, in a louder and more angry voice than before :

'And I tell you this. I won't act in such a play. I won't have anything to do with it; and if I can't be Beast I won't act at all. I won't even look on. No; not if you will go down upon your knees and beg me to. And so there! and so there! and so there!'

The grand burst of furious language was received with shouts of derisive laughter, and 'Hear, hear,' 'Bravo!' 'Encore!' echoed all round.

No one was on his side now ; he had offended them all by his violence and his self-assertion. He stood alone, with everyone against him.

They danced round him, mocking him, imitating him, singing ' And so there ! and so there ! and so there !'

Driven almost wild with passion, he felt that in another moment he should do something that he would be sorry for afterwards, and that the only thing was for him to get away from them all as soon as possible.

' Leave me alone !' he shouted. ' Keep off, or I shall knock somebody down !'

He hit out right and left, and for a moment they all fell back from him, alarmed at his fury. He seized the opportunity for making for the door, and before they had sufficiently recovered from their momentary panic to close around him again, he rushed out of the room, banging the door after him.

Once outside the door, Herbert hardly knew what to do next.

He was crying and sobbing now, and he was ashamed to show himself anywhere in the house, with his swollen eyes and wet tear-stained cheeks.

If he went up to his room he would be sure to meet some of the nurses or younger children in the passages ; if he went into the schoolroom there would be Lotty's mademoiselle, and Lily and Mabel's fräulein. The drawing-rooms and library would be full, for none of the aunts and uncles

were going out this afternoon. It was snowing hard, and he had heard them say so at luncheon.

Where should he go? To stay where he was was impossible. At any moment the children he had just left might come out of the playroom in search of him, and he would sooner do anything than see them again.

How forlorn he felt! How he longed for his mother! How he wished he was back again at home, sitting in the snug little drawing-room with her, and able to pour all his troubles into her ear!

Before he had made up his mind what to do, the very thing happened which he had most dreaded. The door of the play-room opened, and he heard them all coming after him. He had only just time to hide behind the coal-box in the inner hall, when the whole troop of children rushed by.

He heard them all run across the hall, and up the chief staircase, laughing and chattering as they went, evidently on their way to his bedroom to look for him. He must be off somewhere at once. They would be down again directly, and he could well imagine how they would hunt every hole and corner till they found him.

Quick as thought he stole into the outer hall, seized his wide-awake and his ulster, and, with eyes still blinded with passionate tears, and chest still heaving with angry sobs, he opened the hall-door and stepped out on to the gravel path.

A gust of wind blew the door to behind him, and he was left, a poor little, angry, miserable boy, stand-

ing alone in the cold dark evening, with the snow-flakes falling thick and fast upon him.

CHAPTER V.

LEAVING Herbert in the snow, we will return to the warmth of the house he had so hastily and rashly quitted.

The children hunted all over the house, in every place they could think of, but, as you may imagine, he was nowhere to be found. After searching for about half-an-hour, they returned to the play-room and held a consultation as to what was to be done next.

They settled to divide themselves into bands of twos and threes, so as not all to go to the same places together, and after a further hunt, to meet again in the play-room and hear what success had been met with.

This plan was carried out, but no one saw any sign of Herbert. It was rather good fun at first, but they got rather tired of it after a time; and they began to feel that the afternoon was wearing away, and that they ought really to settle something, and be learning their parts. They had already wasted a good deal of time; and what would Uncle Claud say, if, when he returned home, he found no one ready for the rehearsal?

'Well,' said Neville, 'it isn't our fault if he goes

away. We must really settle it without him, and leave some minor part in case he cares to have it. But he certainly said he would not act at all.'

So they set to work to assign all the different parts, and, by universal assent, the Beast's part was given to Jem.

After it was all once settled, they were all very quiet for three-quarters of an hour, learning their parts. After that, they said them to each other, and then had a sort of rehearsal.

By this time it was dark, and they all began to get a little frightened about Herbert.

'I think we had better go and have another hunt,' said Neville.

The others agreed, and they set off again.

They hunted upstairs, downstairs, in every hole and corner, but with no success; and at last they settled to go and look in the drawing-room. It was the only place they had not explored.

Neville, however, was rather unwilling to go in there. His conscience was not quite clear as to the way he had behaved to Herbert; and he did not particularly want to be questioned by his father, who was sitting in the drawing-room, as to his share in the matter.

His father had often spoken to him about teasing and saying provoking things, and told him what a bad habit it was; and he knew that he had done wrong to irritate Herbert, and put him in a rage by his taunts and jeers, when he saw he was getting out of temper.

Lily, however, who was getting dreadfully frightened about Herbert, and beginning to fancy something must have happened to him, insisted on going in.

The others remained outside ; and in a few minutes she returned to them with the same old story. No one had seen anything of Herbert since they all went into the play-room together, after luncheon.

'Oh dear !' sighed Mabel. 'I *do* wish we could find him.'

'I wish you hadn't teased him so, Neville,' said Lotty. 'It was all your fault.'

'It wasn't my fault a bit more than anybody else's,' said Neville, who was getting very uneasy, and therefore resented the accusation all the more.

It was certainly becoming serious.

What were they to do ! What were they to say to Uncle Claud when he arrived ?

What would *he* say when he heard they had all been quarrelling over their parts ? And supposing something *had* happened to Herbert !

'Oh dear !' exclaimed Harry, 'it is very disagreeable, and I wish none of it had ever happened.'

'And so do I ;' 'And so do I,' said some of the others.

'It's not a happy day, after all,' said Lily. 'I thought it was going to be so happy, and now it's not a bit happy. It's a most unhappy day, I think.'

'It's horrid,' said Johnny. 'I wish it was over.'

'And I wish it had never been,' said Harry.

'It's no use finding fault with the *day*,' said Jem. 'It's not the *day's* fault. It's our own fault for quarrelling and irritating Herbert.'

'Dear Jem,' said Lotty, 'I don't think *you* have anything to blame yourself for. *You* didn't irritate him. You are about the only one who didn't.'

'And the only one who didn't insist upon having the best part,' added Mabel.

'Well,' groaned Neville, 'we've made a nice mess of it. We've spoilt all our own enjoyment, and turned all our fun into trouble. I wish we had the day over again. You see if I'd bother Herbert again, or stick out for the best part. Why! if we could only find him, I'd *beg* him to take the part; beg and pray him. That I would! Why, Mabel, what's the matter? You're crying!'

'Not exactly,' said Mabel, her voice shaking all the time; 'but I am so frightened about Herbert. I can't think what *can* have become of him, and I'm so afraid *something* may have happened to him——'

'What—what!' they all cried.

'Something *dreadful*, you know,' she said, her voice sinking to the lowest whisper, 'a dreadful—dreadful thing!'

'What sort of thing?' they said, 'crowding round her, infected by her fear and by her look and manner.'

'Upstairs, you know,' she said anxiously, 'as we

passed through the big, empty, spare room, which is never used because it is so big and cold, I saw——'

'Saw what? Saw what?'

'A great—big—black—box! ' she said, and she shivered all over as she said it.

They all burst out laughing.

'I thought you were going to say a ghost, or Herbert's dead body,' said Neville. 'What is there so dreadful in a great big, black box?'

'It wasn't the box, exactly,' said Mabel, 'but thinking what there might be in it.'

'What did you think there might be in it?' inquired two or three, eagerly and a little uneasily.

'Ah! that was just it,' said Mabel, and she shivered again.

'Well, tell us!—tell us! Out with it!' exclaimed Neville.

'HERBERT!' said Mabel, in an awe-struck whisper. 'Oh, don't you remember,' she went on, 'the story of the Old Oak Chest? I'm so afraid Herbert has done like that poor girl—that he's got in that big box to hide from us, and that the spring has snapped down the lid upon him, and now he can't get out. And that some day—some day, when we are all grown-up men and women, we shall come upon the box, and open it, and find only his "mouldering bones." And—and——'

But here poor little Mabel, overcome by the picture she had conjured up, fairly burst into tears.

'That's easily put to rights,' said Neville; 'we'll all go at once and open the box! Come along.'

And, quick as thought, Neville rushed off, all the others following.

But when they got into the empty room, and saw the 'great big black box' by the dim light of the dying day, they all shrank back a little. A silence fell upon them, and they all kept close together at the door, staring at the box from a safe distance.

'It looks just like a thing to contain "mouldering bones," doesn't it?' said Harry to Neville.

'Well, anyhow, they can't be "mouldering bones" yet,' said Neville, boldly; 'supposing Herbert is in there, he can't have been there more than an hour and a half.'

'Let's come nearer,' said Jem, who, though the quietest, was the bravest of all. 'Perhaps it's empty. We'll lift it up and see.'

Mabel seized hold of Jem's hand. Something about his quiet made her feel more confidence in his protection than in Neville's, in spite of all Neville's bluster and talk.

One behind the other, they all advanced, and silently they stood round the box.

'Give a hand, Harry,' said Jem, 'we'll try and lift it.'

They did so: but it was quite heavy, and they could not move it easily. They let it down again.

There was no doubt it was full of *something*—but of what?

Lotty, trembling a little, now tried to lift the lid ; pulled and fumbled, fumbled and pulled. All to no purpose. The box was locked !

‘Oh dear!’ cried Mabel ; ‘it is true then. He has got in, and the lid snapped upon him with a spring.’

‘I say,’ said Lotty anxiously, to Jem, ‘do you think he could breathe in there?’

Poor little Mabel overheard this remark, and was for a moment quite beside herself with fear.

She rushed forward, and began knocking on the box with her knuckles, as if it was Herbert’s bedroom door.

‘Herbert! Herbert!’ she said, ‘it’s only me! No one but me shall come in ; if you’ll only say if you are alive and safe. Herbert! dear, darling Herbert! are you there?’

And she put her ear down to the box and listened anxiously.

There was not a sound.

‘Herbert dear! if you only answer, and say you’re there, you shall be got out, and choose your part, and be the Beast, or anything you like——’

‘I say,’ interrupted Jem hotly, ‘you know the lady’s-maid ; go and ask her for the key—quick. We’ll open the box in a moment. Here! I’ll come with you.’

Away they both rushed, and in an incredibly short space of time returned with the maid and the key.

‘It is quite, quite impossible,’ said the maid, ‘for

any young gentleman to be in there. The box is full of every sort of thing. It is where my mistress keeps her stock of poor-clothes, sheets, blankets, and all manner. However, we'll open it and see.'

She did so ; the children crowded eagerly round, turned out everything upon the floor ; but it was as she had said. There was nothing there but poor-clothes.

Half relieved and half disappointed, the children turned away, and went back to the play-room, leaving the poor maid to re-arrange the things.

'There's no use saying anything more,' said Jem ; 'we must do what we ought to have done long ago. We must go at once and tell our fathers and mothers all about it. Herbert must have gone out and got lost in the snow, and the only thing to be done is to send torches and lanthorns in every direction.'

With very long faces they all marched to the drawing-room, and with Lotty at their head, who had agreed to be spokeswoman, opened the door, and walked slowly and solemnly in.

CHAPTER VI.

EVEN outside in the snow, Herbert did not feel secure. Neville and Harry would think no more of the weather than he did himself, and would very likely come out after him.

So he could not stay where he was. He must

be off somewhere. And he set off running, he didn't much care in what direction.

He was still sobbing and crying, and was determined none of them should see him till every trace of tears should be gone.

He could fancy how Neville would call him a 'water-pot' and a 'cry-baby;' and he was determined to stay out till he had quite got over it, even if he had to stay hours and hours in the snow.

He was still very angry; and his tears, I am sorry to say, were not tears of sorrow and repentance—which are tears of which no boy need ever be ashamed—but of rage and mortification, disappointment and wounded pride.

Fear seized him that he was being pursued. He fancied he heard voices in the distance, behind him, and he rushed wildly on.

He did not know where he was, for the air was obscured by the falling snow, and the grass and road the same colour. But as long as he fancied he heard those voices, he did not much care where he went, if only he got away from them.

He stopped at last from sheer want of breath, and then he listened.

To his dismay he found he had not been mistaken. There *were* voices behind him; he could hear them now quite plainly. They were laughing voices—voices of boys and girls mingling merrily together—and of boys and girls running as they laughed and talked.

In his excitement he thought he could distinguish

Neville's voice above the rest, and he set off running quicker than ever. But, run as he would, they seemed to gain upon him. He was obliged to stop every now and then to gain breath, and he all at once discovered that he was getting further and further from the house, and nearer and nearer to the lodge.

Yes, there was the lodge, not very many yards in front of him. He could see the little light in the casement window, where probably Mrs. Harris and little Beauty were sitting over their work.

At the sight a pang shot through him. Everything seemed so changed since yesterday afternoon, when he had driven through the gate in such high spirits, waving his handkerchief and looking forward with such delight to all the fun he was going to have. Or even since the night before, when he had so gladly accepted Mrs. Harris' invitation to come to the lodge and see her and her little grandchild.

How impossible such a thing seemed now! Fancy presenting himself in there with his tear-stained face and swollen eyes. He! a great boy nine years old. How surprised little Beauty would be to see her protector of last night transformed into a sobbing little runaway boy!

No, he must turn back as quick as he could, and get as far from the lodge as possible. But while these thoughts had been passing through his mind, he had slackened his pace, in fact, had stood almost still; and he had given those behind time to gain upon him. He heard their voices plainer than

ever ; nay, he even fancied he could dimly discern their advancing figures through all the blinding snow. He was now, as it were, caught in a trap. There was the lodge on one side, and the advancing children on the other.

What *was* he to do ?

There was only one course open to him. He must double back and pass the children, trusting to his own legs, and the surprise his unexpected manœuvre would cause them, to give him a few minutes' advantage, and enable him to get back to the house before them.

His mind was made up. His heart beat high. Back he turned, and shouting, ' I'll knock down the first who touches me,' he rushes towards the advancing group.

Blind with passion and excitement, he rushed pell-mell into their midst, striking out right and left. One or two recoiled as he approached ; but one, as it seemed to him, stood right in his path, stretching out its hands as if to impede his flight. He seized this one by the shoulders, and with all his might flung it to the ground, and rushed on on his now unobstructed way.

He ran and ran till he was out of earshot of any sound of voices, out of earshot too of the pitiful cry of the child he had thrown down, which had struck like a knell upon his hearing, despite his wild passion, and his own loud breathing and sobs. And then all at once he stopped short.

What makes him suddenly stand so stock still ?

What sudden thought cuts him through and through like a knife as the sound of that little cry all at once echoes in his heart? What has he done?

The blood rushes to his face, and his heart beats loud and fast as the thought passes into certainty, that he has made some terrible mistake! that those children were *not* the children that he had imagined them to be, and that in his blind passion and fury he has wreaked his vengeance on an innocent person, and injured some poor unoffending child.

And if so, on whom? Who *were* the children he had met? Of course! . . . He saw it all now. They were some of the village children coming home from school. No! not that. It was holiday time; but from sliding on the pond in the park, where he had seen them in the distance that morning. But *who* had he knocked down? Ah! that was it. Herbert's heart was beating faster than ever, for he had a horrible presentiment that he knew who it was; that the little voice that had lifted up its pitiful cry was not unknown to him. It must have been—alas! he was quite certain now that it *was* little Beauty, the dear little girl whom he had befriended, and who had clung to him so confidently only the night before!

All Herbert's passion was subdued at once. He was seized with horror and the most bitter remorse when he reflected on the length to which his temper and his want of self-control had led him. With

deep mortification, too, that *he*, who prided himself so on being brave and manly, should have knocked down a little girl. He wrung his hands and exclaimed :

‘Oh ! what a brute I have been ! I have acted indeed the part of a Beast—Beauty and the Beast, indeed !’

He retraced his steps after a time, to see if he could be of any use, or if the child were really much hurt ; but the whole party had disappeared.

Straining his eyes through the darkness and falling snow, he saw that he was close to the lodge again. The door was open, and he could hear the eager voices of children and the sympathetic voice of Mrs. Harrison ; but he could not hear what anyone said.

He felt as if he ought to go in, and explain and beg the child’s pardon for the mistake he had made. But he could not make up his mind to do so. Satisfied that, at any rate, the child had reached home and was in safe hands, he made his way back to the house a saddened, sobered, conscience-stricken boy ; and slipping up the back stairs, he got to his own bed-room, and there gave himself up to the sorrow and repentance which had been so long in coming.

Sadly he reflected on his mother’s warnings and advice, and the lesson she had so often given him on self-control. How he longed to be able to go to her, and to pour out all his troubles. His aunts were strange to him, and he felt there was

no one in the house to whom he could go for advice.

How long he lay on the floor thinking it all over he did not know. He was roused by the voices of the little children in the passage on their way down to the drawing-room. This meant that it was half-past five at least. What was he to do next? How was he ever to face all the others? But something must be done, and quickly too.

In his despair he bethought him of going downstairs with the small children, and slipping into the drawing-room with them.

He jumped up and ran down the stairs, overtaking the little party in the hall, just outside the drawing-room door.

No one would observe his entrance, or think it strange he should be there, if they did. He was known to be fond of children, and so no one would be surprised that he should come in at their hour. It was Liberty Hall; everyone was free to do as they liked best.

So, taking one of the smallest children by the hand, he opened the drawing-room door boldly, and walked in.

The first thing he saw was Uncle Claud, standing with his back to the fire, having evidently not long arrived.

This sight rather took Herbert aback; he felt a little nervous as to the questions that might be put to him, and he felt himself getting red, and trying to avoid his uncle's eye. To his surprise and re-

lief, however, Uncle Claud took no notice of him ; he looked at him for a moment, certainly, very fixedly, but after that went on talking to the others.

Herbert breathed a sigh of relief, and established himself rather out of sight on the floor by the fire, with a large picture-book on his lap, which he began showing to one or two of the children, who eagerly clustered round him.

His heart beat rather quickly once when one of his aunts said rather suddenly :

‘ Herbert, are you there ? The others were inquiring for you just now.’

He murmured something rather unintelligible, and was very thankful to the small girl by his side for tearing the page of the picture-book, and thereby diverting her mother’s attention.

‘ There have been several cases of assault in the neighbourhood lately,’ said Uncle Claud, suddenly.

‘ I suppose a good many rough men connected with the new railway line take advantage of the snow and the darkness,’ said one of the ladies.

‘ What do the naughty men do ?’ asked one of the children ; ‘ And what is a ‘ salt ?’ asked another at the same moment ; ‘ And do they steal the salt ?’ chimed in a third.

‘ Assault,’ answered Uncle Claud, answering all three questions at once, ‘ means to hurt people, or knock them down.’

‘ But what for ?’ persisted one child.

‘ For various reasons,’ answered Uncle Claud ;

'sometimes it is with a view to robbing the person after knocking him down. Sometimes it is from revenge, or from some wicked feeling of anger or temper.'

'What is done to the naughty unkind person?' asked a very small girl, who was well known to be Uncle Claud's favourite.

'The great tall policeman comes in,' he answered, 'marches up to him, lays his hand on his shoulder, and says——'

'What does he say?' said the child, rather scared.

'He says, in a great big voice, "I apprehend you on a charge of assault!" and then he takes him off to prison by the collar. And serve him right.'

'I'm rather frightened,' said the child.

'You needn't be, darling,' he said very gently, stroking the child's hair; 'he only comes to naughty, unkind people, not to good little gentle things like you.'

'No,' said the little girl, with a long breath of relief; 'and we're *all* good, kind, gentle people here, ain't we? so he won't come to this house, particularly at Christmastime.'

'We ought all to be,' answered Uncle Claud, gravely; 'but I'm afraid there's always a black sheep in every flock.'

And as he spoke, Herbert felt as if his uncle shot a glance at him. He felt mystified and uncomfortable; he couldn't make it all out.

But there came a sudden interruption. The

door slowly opened, and Herbert, dreading who might be going to enter, shrank away still further behind his aunt with his little companions.

And thus, my readers—who know better than Herbert what the interruption was—thus it came to pass that when Neville, and Harry, and Johnnie, and Jem, and Lotty, and Lily, and Mabel came in open-mouthed with their tale of horror and despair, the first person they saw was Herbert, sitting quietly in a corner of the hearth-rug, reading ‘Jack the Giant-killer’ to the little ones!

* * * * *

But whatever were their feelings, they had to keep them to themselves, for the moment Uncle Claud’s eye fell upon them he sent them all off to the play-room, saying they were to put on their dresses at once, and that the full-dress rehearsal would take place as soon as they were ready. There was no time to be lost, and off they all had to go, Herbert unwillingly following. He felt it would be less remarkable to do so than to remain behind, and he was so humbled that he felt he would accept any part they chose to give him. He was ready to be even a servant with nothing to say.

But what was his surprise when he reached the play-room to find them all crowding round him, and begging his pardon for all that had passed between them. He could hardly believe his ears. There was Neville shaking hands with him, and asking him to forget and forgive all the disagreeable

things he had said ; Harry, also, and the girls kissed him, and said they were so happy to see him again, and so glad to think he was safe and well and among them all again, and with one voice asking where in the world he had hidden himself, and telling him how dreadfully frightened they had all been about him. It dawned upon him suddenly that they must have thought he was lost in the snow, and he told them he had been out.

‘But,’ he added, ‘please do not ask me anything more. I have been very unhappy, but I am happier now that you are all so kind to me.’

‘And now you must promise to act the Beast’s part,’ said Jem.

‘Yes, yes !’ cried all the rest.

‘Oh no,’ said Herbert ; ‘I would rather not, really. I don’t feel as if I should do it well now.’

‘You must ! you must !’ cried all ; ‘just to show you have forgiven us. Quick ! run and get your skin ; and we must all hurry scurry, for Uncle Claud will be here in a minute.’

So saying, they all ran off to dress, and Herbert, with a heavy heart, prepared to do the very thing he had so ardently longed to do. But it was no pleasure to him now. He would far rather not act at all. He felt he had not spirit enough in him to do the part well.

And so it proved. For when the time came for him to go on, such a poor, faint roaring Beast sounded from behind the scenes that Uncle Claud

got quite impatient, and called out to him to do the part properly or else leave it alone.

Herbert roused himself after that, and got on better, though several times his thoughts wandered to little Beauty, and her pitiful cry in the snow, and each time provoked his uncle to call out, 'Speak up, man! No one can hear a word you say.'

As the play proceeded, Herbert threw himself more into his part, tried to put little Beauty out of his head, and succeeded in acquitting himself at last more to his uncle's satisfaction.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO hours later the house was lighted from end to end, and all was bustle and excitement. Guests began to arrive; carriages drove up every moment. All the children, excepting the actors, were assembled in the hall dressed and ready for the evening's entertainment, and it was here, also, that the guests were received.

At nine o'clock there was a general move to the acting-room, which was dark, and everyone was marshalled to their seats. Soon everybody was seated. The curtain which concealed the stage, was of course down; but from behind it came every now and then the sound of voices and laughter, quickly repressed by the admonitory voice of the stage-

manager. A head once or twice peered from behind the corner of the curtain, and was hastily withdrawn at the sound of the same warning voice. The actors were evidently getting impatient to begin their performance.

Presently the sound of music was heard from behind the curtain, and a chorus of young voices sang 'Rule Britannia.'

After the applause which greeted the singing had died away, there was silence again, and the expectation among the audience was raised to the highest pitch, especially among the children, who had the front seats. All of a sudden a long, low whistle was heard, and the curtain drew up, discovering Lily and Mabel as the two sisters.

I need not enter into the story of the play. 'Beauty and the Beast' is probably well known to all my readers. Suffice it to say that each child acted his or her part, his or her very best. To judge by the roaring of the Beast before he came on the stage, Herbert must have quite recovered his spirits. He acted capitally, and did his part to perfection. Long and loud was the applause which greeted his first exit; and when the time came for him to throw off his disguise, no one could have imagined that the bright, happy-looking boy prince, who emerged from beneath the skin, was the same boy who had sobbed and cried in the snow only a few hours before.

The excitement of the evening had driven all sad thoughts away; and as Herbert stood alone

in front of the foot-lights, where each was in turn called, at the end of the play, to receive the applause of the audience, he not only looked, but felt, supremely happy.

He was quite a little hero when he came from behind the scenes, still wearing his prince's dress, and took his seat among the other children. Each of the little ones wanted him to sit next them, and all were eager to examine his sword, and the jewels in his cap.

The children's part in the evening's entertainment was now over, and all the little actors took their seats among the audience, to see the 'Tableaux Vivants' which were now to follow. First came

'THE PITCHER AT THE WELL,'

one of the children's aunts, standing, with a great vase on her head, and her hand and arm upheld, supporting it ; while one of their uncles, sitting on the edge of the imaginary well, seemed to be asking her to give him a drink. This tableau was much admired and duly applauded by the children, who could not imagine how Annt Mary could stand so still. Then came

'THE PARTING OF CHARLES I. AND HIS
CHILDREN.'

In this, two of the younger children had a part. Next

'THE MURDER OF THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER,'
this met with rounds of applause. Then

‘MILTON AND HIS DAUGHTERS,’

in which the blind poet was represented as dictating to one daughter, who was writing down the words as they fell from his lips, while the other was listening with rapt attention, looking all the while wonderingly and admiringly at her father. That was the last tableau ; but the audience were told to keep their seats, as there was something more to come ; though *what* it was, they were not told, and nobody seemed to know.

Herbert had been watching all the tableaux with the deepest interest. He was enjoying himself thoroughly. He had been pleased and gratified by all the praises which had been heaped upon him, and the other boys had been so kind, and had made such a hero of him, that all sad recollections which had at one time overpowered him, had been completely driven out of his head. His uncle's words and manner had passed from his mind, and he was entirely given up to the enjoyment of the moment.

And now slow music rises from behind the scenes, and Uncle Claud's voice is heard.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, we are now going to give you a new version of “Beauty and the Beast” in a kind of moving tableau, a panorama, as it were.’

The words struck upon Herbert's ear with a vague sense of impending evil. He looked up quickly and anxiously, and, as the curtain drew slowly up, a feeling that something disagreeable was going to happen came over him, and his heart began to beat quickly. The scene was a snow-

storm. Small white flakes were falling in every direction, to the intense delight of all the little children.

Little inquiring voices were heard breaking out in different parts of the darkened room—‘How *do* they do it?’ ‘How *can* they manage it?’—and the explanatory voices of elders, saying something about ‘bits of paper’ and a ‘waste paper basket;’ but all was drowned by the indignant ‘Hush!’ which came simultaneously from the elder children. Every eye was strained upon the stage, to see what was coming, and Herbert’s gaze was painfully intent. For, standing upon the stage, in the middle of the snow-storm, was a little figure which he knew well: a little figure, with a red cloak, and a blue worsted hood upon its head. Nor was he the only one who recognised it. There was a cry from all the children, ‘It’s Beauty! That’s little Beauty,’ and a small compassionate voice added, ‘Oh! *po’r* little Beauty—out in *all* the snow!’

The curtain fell, and the little figure in the snow-storm disappeared from view.

Herbert, gazing, as if by doing so he should see through the mystery with his own eyes and solve it, was standing bolt upright. He had risen to his feet unconsciously in his wonder and excitement. His heart was beating quicker than ever, and his face was paler than it had been a few minutes before.

‘And now,’ said the sonorous voice of Uncle Claud, from behind the scenes, ‘we are going to show you THE BEAST.’

The curtain drew slowly up, and discovered the snowstorm again. But there was a change in the centre figure.

There, instead of little Beauty, stood a figure in a brown ulster and a black wideawake ; at the sight of which Herbert turned ashy white, and grasped or tried to grasp the back of the chair immediately in front of him.

He could hardly breathe for thinking what might be coming next.

The children clapped their hands. 'That's Herbert!' they all shouted. 'He was "the Beast," you know, just now,' they explained to the little ones.

Their voices sounded a long way off to Herbert. The room was beginning to go round and round, and he hardly knew if he was standing on his head or not. There was a curious singing noise in his ears, and his knees trembled under him and knocked together.

But the curtain descended, and the scene disappeared.

'Now,' said Uncle Claud again, 'we are going to show you

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

You shall see them together.'

Herbert getting more and more giddy every moment, but with his gaze still fixed upon the stage, saw the curtain rise, and the two figures standing together. And as he looked he saw, to his horror, his own figure begin to move. He saw it begin to

stride across the stage, with frowning face and furious gestures. He saw it advance towards little Beauty, with uplifted arm and in menacing attitude ; and a sound broke from him half of horror and half of despair. A cry, too, burst from all the children, as the boy on the stage seized little Beauty by the shoulders and flung her roughly to the ground.

‘It was a mistake,’ shrieked Herbert, ‘a mis—t—a—k——’ But his voice died away, and was lost in a sudden loud thundering knocking, which came upon the play-room door. Every head was instantly turned that way. The door flew open, and the bright light in the hall played upon the figure of a tall policeman, who, advancing to the master of the house, said in a loud voice :

‘I beg your pardon, sir ; but have you among your guests a young gentleman of the name of Manners ? I apprehend him on a charge of assault.’

But Herbert heard no more. As the policeman spoke the giddiness in his head became overpowering. He tried to speak, but no sound came. Lights, stage, children, danced before him, and then faded away, and he fell, fainting, into the arms of the policeman, which were just held out in time to catch him, and to prevent his falling headlong on the floor.

CONCLUDING CHAPTER.

IN order to explain what seemed so mysterious and inexplicable to poor Herbert, we must return to the afternoon preceding the play, and follow the movements of Uncle Claud on his return from his expedition to London.

It so happened, that just as the carriage which had met him stopped at the lodge gate, on its way home, the procession of school children, escorting the poor little bruised and sobbing Beauty, was going in at the door, Uncle Claud, seeing something was the matter, instantly got out of the brougham, and followed them. By this means he arrived in the cottage just in time to hear the story poured forth to Mrs. Harrison by the indignant little boys who had witnessed the unprovoked attack—which story was confirmed by poor little Beauty's appearance, covered with snow, and her forehead bruised and bleeding, from having in her fall come in contact with a sharp piece of frozen wood.

Uncle Claud, as you may imagine, was as indignant in his own mind as the boys, and indeed could hardly believe his own ears.

However, the wounds were not really serious, and the child more frightened than hurt; so after expressing his sympathy, and asking a good many questions, Uncle Claud took leave of them all, and got back into the carriage. But as he went

along, he determined he would give Herbert a lesson he should never forget.

'Coward!' he said to himself once or twice.

The very idea of a *boy*, from whatever cause, knocking down a little girl, would have made Uncle Claud's indignation boil over. But in this case there seemed *no* provocation, no motive. Simply, as far as he could make out from the other children, it was because she stood in his way. It appeared to Uncle Claud a piece of imperious tyranny of which he could not think with any patience.

Still, Uncle Claud was very just; and he was not sure it would be right to condemn Herbert unheard. It *might* have been an accident. He was inclined, strong as the proofs were against him, to give him a chance of explaining himself.

He expected, on his return home, to find that everybody knew the story, and would be ready to give him their divers opinions as to Herbert's share of blame in the matter. But to his surprise, the subject was not mentioned, though he stood talking to the assembled party in the drawing-room for fully ten minutes after his arrival.

He began to think the village boys must have made a mistake, and that it had not been Herbert at all. By-and-by, as my readers will remember, the door opened to admit the younger children, and with them—Herbert. One glance at him convinced Uncle Claud of his guilt. The boy slipped in as if he did not wish to be observed, and instead of running up eagerly to his uncle as usual, he appeared

anxious to avoid his eye, and disappeared somewhere behind one of his aunts, with one of the smallest of the children.

Now, if Uncle Claud hated one thing more than another, it was anything like a want of openness—anything approaching to deceit. It became evident to him at once, not only that Herbert was guilty, but that he was trying to conceal his guilt. He was evidently trusting to the tale of his misbehaviour not reaching the house, at any rate for that evening. Uncle Claud's face assumed a very stern expression, and he instantly resolved to expose him in some way before the whole company. What that way should be, he could not at once determine.

But he thought he would give him one or two opportunities of confessing his fault first. So he led the conversation up to the subject of assaults, as you will remember, hoping that Herbert, convicted by his own conscience, might speak. But that failed. During the rehearsing he gave him several other opportunities of telling his story and righting himself. But he took advantage of none; and so then Uncle Claud made up his mind to punish him. He sent down to the lodge to borrow Beauty's cloak and hood, and easily possessed himself of Herbert's wideawake and ulster, retaining behind the scene two of the children of the proper sizes to act the parts. With what success we have seen. But what about the policeman? The policeman was Uncle Claud. He had by him a policeman's dress in which he had acted on former occa-

sions, and had intended to appear in it as a surprise to the children at some time or other during the evening.

It struck him that his sudden appearance would form a fitting conclusion to the panorama, and would show Herbert who it was that had brought him thus publicly to shame, as a punishment for his conduct and its concealment.

But he had never expected to produce such an effect upon the boy. Indeed he had not expected that Herbert should have so completely failed to recognise him. Nothing would have been further from his wishes than to give him such a terrible fright, had he known the overwrought state into which the boy had worked himself, and the moment he perceived Herbert's condition, his whole feeling towards him changed.

Displeasure turned into anxiety, and nothing could have been more tender than the way in which the supposed policeman took up the fainting boy in his arms and carried him out of the crowd into his own bedroom the other side of the hall, where he laid him down on the bed.

First hastily throwing off some part of his own disguise, he loosened Herbert's collar, and dashed cold water into his face. With the aid of one of his sisters-in-law, who had followed him, he set to work with all the restoratives they could think of, to restore the boy to consciousness.

They were soon successful. It was not very long before Herbert opened his eyes, and fixed them,

with a puzzled look, on the person who, half policeman, half Uncle Claud, was kneeling by his side.

He had turned giddy and faint, but he had not really quite fainted ; so it did not take him long to put two-and-two together, and to take in all that had happened.

‘ Was it *you*, Uncle Claud ? ’ he said wonderingly.

Uncle Claud smiled and nodded, but would allow no conversation at first.

However, Herbert begged so hard to be allowed to tell his story, and said he should feel so much better and happier if he had it all out, that Uncle Claud at length consented.

He listened most attentively as Herbert described the events of the day from the beginning to the end, and as the tale went on, his face lost gradually much of its gravity. To Herbert’s immense relief, he told him when it was finished that he had not been nearly so much to blame as he had supposed, and that had he known the details, he never should have given him so severe a lesson.

He added a few kind, though stern words, on the necessity of self-control, and also pointed out how much better it would have been if Herbert had at once told some one the story directly he had returned home.

‘ And now, ’ he said, rising, ‘ I shall go and right you before the crowd in the other room, and you shall hear all about it to-morrow. ’

Left under the care of his aunt, Herbert was very glad to take her advice and try and go to sleep,

for he was quite exhausted with all he had been through.

As soon as she saw he was sleeping soundly, she had him carried upstairs to his own room, and he never woke till the next morning.

Meanwhile Uncle Claud made his way back to the play-room, and, after a few words of conversation with Jem, whom he called on one side, he mounted the stage, and, advancing to the footlights, called out that he had a few words to say to the audience before they dispersed.

He then explained the whole affair, exonerating Herbert entirely from having intentionally done the mean action of which he had been suspected; adding a few words of pointed rebuke to those who, by a foolish habit of teasing, had goaded him into losing his temper.

‘Not,’ he added, in conclusion, ‘not that I in the least wish to excuse him, or to palliate his fault. There is no excuse for passion and violence. But I do say that the blame of the disastrous consequences of Herbert’s want of self-control lies in a great measure at the door of those who, knowing his disposition, and seeing the condition he was in, did their utmost to drive him to extremities. I ask no questions; I mention no names. Let those whose consciences tell them the cap fits, put it on; and may they take to themselves a lesson for the coming year.’

There were one or two faces suffused with crimson as Uncle Claud brought his short speech to a close;

and I am happy to say, that as he descended from the platform, the owners of those crimsoning faces ran straight up to him, like honest English boys, and owned their share in the matter and their deep regret for the same.

Uncle Claud shook hands with them heartily ; and then, in answer to a question which was going from lip to lip among the audience, he once more advanced to the footlights, and said he was most happy to be able to tell them Herbert was recovering rapidly, though he would not be able to re-appear among them that evening.

‘But as to that,’ concluded Uncle Claud, ‘the evening is over. The play is ended and the lights going out. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a happy new year.’

THE TOWN-CRIER;
OR,
A LESSON OF UNSELFISHNESS.

CHAPTER I.

THIS is a story of which half is about a rich little girl, whose name was Edith Leigh, and the other half about a poor little girl, whose name was Nancy Brown.

To begin with Edith Leigh. She was an only child, and she lived with her father and mother in a beautiful old place in Kent, which she was very fond of, and where she was very happy.

She had all sorts of pets and amusements in her beautiful home.

To begin with, there was her lamb, and her white rabbits, and her silver pheasant, and her little chickens.

Then there were the gold and silver fish in the little pond by her little garden; and close by was her own little tool-house and her little arbour, and even a tiny frame where she kept her most precious plants in the winter.

You see she was an only child and had no companions, so her kind mamma and papa did their best to give her plenty of interests and employments, so that she should not be dull all alone.

Perhaps of all her live pets, the one Edith loved the best was her little canary. He was so tame

and so affectionate. He would kiss her through the bars of his cage, and perch on her finger, and eat out of her hand. Then he had a thrilling note like a nightingale, and Edith thought there was nothing so beautiful as his song.

There was one drawback to Homeleigh, as Edith's home was called.

(A 'drawback' means something that prevented it being quite so perfect as it might have been.)

And the drawback to Homeleigh was, that owing to the quantities of beautiful trees that grew near the house the place got very damp and unwholesome towards the end of October, when the leaves were falling.

Edith had once caught such a very bad cold, and been so very ill at that time, that her papa and mamma had made up their minds never to stay at Homeleigh during the fall of the leaf again, but always to go to some nice sea-side place till the leaves were quite off, and the winter fairly begun.

And so it happened, at the time my story begins, that October having come, Edith and her papa and mamma were preparing to leave their beautiful home in Kent, and to go to Folkestone for six weeks.

Now Edith liked a change as much as most children, and was delighted at the thoughts of bathing in the sea and digging on the beach, and having donkey-rides.

But there was one part of it which she did *not* like, and that was saying good-bye to her garden,

and her rabbits, and her gold and silver fish, and her kitten, and her lamb, and all her other pets and possessions.

Her kind mamma, however, said that she thought they could manage to take her canary with them, and so, as he was the one Edith loved best of all, she more easily made up her mind to leaving the rest behind.

It was not a long journey; for Folkestone is a sea-side place in Kent, and if you look it out in the map, you will see it is the place where the steamer starts from to take you to Boulogne; so if any of you have ever been abroad, you must have passed through Folkestone, unless by chance you went from Dover to Calais.

Mr. and Mrs. Leigh and Edith arrived at about three o'clock at their house in Bouverie Square, which Mr. Leigh had taken for six weeks.

There was a charming nursery for Edith, and a bow-window where there was a capital nail to hang Dicky on, and he was hung up there directly, and given fresh sand, and seed, and water, which he had had to do without during the journey.

He was very soon hopping about and pouring out his beautiful nightingale trill, quite as happy as if he had been in his accustomed place at Homeleigh.

Edith was very happy too, for everything was new to her, and the sun was so bright and the sea so sparkling, and such crowds of happy little boys and girls about in goat-chaises or on donkeys, or

else running about with spades in their hands, and colour in their cheeks.

Edith was at the drawing-room window all the rest of the afternoon watching it all, and she went to bed early, that to-morrow might come quick, when she should be able to go out and dig, and ride on a donkey, too.

Soon after breakfast next morning, Edith and her mamma went on the beach, and there Edith dug and played to her heart's content.

The next thing was to go and buy some groundsel for Dicky, for he was accustomed to have some almost every day out of Edith's little garden.

Mrs. Leigh soon spied a greengrocer's shop, and went in, while Edith remained at the shop-door looking out into the street.

As she stood there, there came by a poor woman with a barrow of fruit and vegetables, and by her side was a little girl just the same age and size as Edith, only she was pale and thin, and looked as if she had not had a good dinner for a very long time.

Now this was Nancy Brown, the poor little girl, who I told you half my story was going to be about.

But though *you* know it, Edith did not, and little thought she should ever come to know that poor and hungry child.

Still they looked at each other, as little girls will, and, in fact, Edith stared at her so, that Nancy's mother thought she wanted to buy, and stopped, saying :

'Any pears or nuts to-day ; chickweed and groundsel for singing birds, or turf for larks?'

'Oh, groundsel!' said Edith ; 'yes, stop a minute, I'll ask mamma.'

She ran into the shop.

'Mamma, here's a poor woman with groundsel.'

'Thank you, dear, but I've bought Dicky enough to last him a week, or more,' said her mamma, and went on giving orders to the shopman about sending fruit and vegetables to the house.

Edith saw she was busy and did not want to be interrupted ; so, like a sensible girl, she did not go on bothering, like some children would, but went back to the shop-door, and said :

'Mamma says she has bought as much as she wants.'

The poor woman looked disappointed.

'I'm sorry to hear it, miss, for Nancy and me we've sold nothing all day but a vegetable marrow, and only got twopence for that.' Little Nancy looked at Edith with her sad dark eyes, and Edith felt very sorry too.

'Are you very poor?' she said, stepping out on the pavement. Nancy was beginning to answer, when Edith heard her mamma calling, and ran back again into the shop.

'Mamma, here's such a poor little girl. Please, some money, quick! They've only got twopence.'

'We'll see, dear, in a minute,' said her mamma. 'Take this packet of groundsel. I want you to carry it home for me.'

Edith took the parcel and waited while her mamma paid the money.

'Now we'll see,' said Mrs. Leigh. Edith took her mamma's hand, and led her eagerly to the door.

'She's so poor, and such sorrowful eyes, mamma, and only as big as me.' But when they got into the street the little girl and the poor woman and the barrow of vegetables were all gone !

Mrs. Leigh and Edith looked up the street and down the street, and all round about, but it was to no purpose.

Nowhere was the barrow to be seen.

CHAPTER II.

EDITH was very much disappointed at first. She had taken quite a fancy to the little girl with the sad eyes.

Her mamma, however, assured her she need not give up the hope of meeting the barrow again, as Folkestone was then a small town with few streets in it.

If they did not happen to see the little girl this morning, they were pretty certain to see her this afternoon, and if by chance they missed her this afternoon, they were almost sure to meet her to-morrow.

So Edith was comforted, and she and her mamma walked on.

Presently they came to a small crowd of boys

standing round a man with a big bell in his hand. He was a very fat man, dressed like a postman, only smarter.

He had on a cocked-hat with gold lace, and a long collar trimmed the same as the hat.

‘Oh, mamma!’ said Edith, ‘who is that man?’

Her mamma answered that he was just going to speak, and that Edith had better listen to what he was going to say, and that she would explain to her afterwards who he was.

So Mrs. Leigh and Edith joined the crowd and waited.

Presently the man rang his bell, once, twice, three times, and then in a deep gruff voice he said:

‘Lost !
Lost !!
Lost !!!’

All the little boys laughed, and Edith laughed a little, but she was very much puzzled.

Before, however, she had time to speak to her mamma, he rang his bell again, and three times repeated:

‘Lost !
Lost !!
Lost !!!’

‘What is lost, mamma?’

‘Hush! you’ll hear if you listen.’

So Edith listened again.

This time the man only rang once, and then said:

‘Lost !
On the Beach
A Geneva WATCH ! !’

He said the word watch so loud that Edith quite jumped, and so did some of the rest of the children standing round.

Then they all laughed because they had jumped. And then they were all as still as little mice because they saw the man was going to speak again.

‘Lost !
On the Beach !’

‘I won’t jump this time,’ said a little boy near Edith, ‘because I *know* he’s going to say “*watch* !” with a great bounce.’

‘No—no more will I,’ said another boy.

‘No, and I won’t either,’ said Edith to her mamma.

‘Lost !
On the Beach !
A Geneva WATCH !!
And CHAIN !!!’

Oh dear ! how Edith jumped, and how the boy jumped who said he wouldn’t jump, and how the other boy jumped who said he wouldn’t jump either; and how they all laughed after they had jumped, at having been made to jump after all !

‘I never expected the great bounce of a “chain !”’ said the first boy.

‘No more did I,’ said the other.

‘No, and no more did I, either, mamma,’ said Edith.

Then the man went on to say, that whoever found the watch, and would bring it to a certain house in a certain street, would have one pound reward.

After that, he walked on to another street, to begin again, and Edith and her mamma returned home.

As they went, her mamma explained to her that the man was a 'town-crier,' and that people who had lost their watches, or other things, went and told him, so that he might call it out all over the town.

By these means, those people who might happen to have found the lost articles, knew where to take them to, and got rewarded for their trouble.

Edith quite understood, and thought it was a very good plan indeed.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Edith and her mamma got home, they found it was nearly dinner-time.

'Run upstairs and give Dicky his groundsel,' said Mrs. Leigh; 'and then get ready for dinner, and come down again.'

Edith trotted off, and her mamma sat down to write a letter.

But she had not got very far before she was interrupted by the door opening, and Edith rushing in, crying as if her heart would break.

‘Why! my dear little girl, what is the matter?’

Mrs. Leigh turned round as she spoke, and saw, to her surprise, that instead of being ready for luncheon, Edith was still in her walking things.

Fearing she had hurt herself on her way upstairs, Mrs. Leigh took her on her lap, and tried to make out what had happened.

‘Did you tumble downstairs, darling?’

‘Oh! no, no.’

‘Couldn’t you find nurse?’

‘Oh! yes, yes.’

‘Were you frightened at anything?’ Edith shook her head, and went on crying more than ever.

‘Try and tell me, dear, what it is. Don’t cry so.’

Edith tried, but her mamma could only make out that somebody or something was ‘gone.’

‘Who is gone, dear?’

Edith burst out again, and sobbed ‘Dicky!’

‘Dicky? Do you mean your little canary has gone?’

Edith nodded her head, and went on to say that when she got upstairs with the groundsel, nurse had met her at the door of the nursery and told her she was sorry to say someone had by mistake left the cage-door open, and that she was very much afraid Dicky had flown out of the window.

‘She showed me the cage quite, quite, quite empty,’ sobbed Edith; ‘no dickybird, no nothing. Isn’t it sad, mamma?’

And poor Edith cried again.

The nurse now appeared at the door with the empty birdcage, and repeated what Edith had said.

‘But, Miss Edith, dear,’ said nurse, ‘I think if we put the cage in the window, with the door open, it is very likely Dicky will come back again, and particularly if you put your groundsel in to tempt him. Don’t you think that would be a good plan ma’am?’

Mrs. Leigh said she thought it would be a very good plan, and she advised Edith to go upstairs with nurse and help to do it.

‘Then,’ she said, ‘if by the time you have finished your dinner with me Dicky has not come back, I have thought of another way of finding him.’

‘Oh! what?’ said Edith.

‘I’ll tell you after dinner,’ said her mamma; ‘run up now, and get washed and dressed, for it is rather late.’

So Edith and her nurse went upstairs, and Mrs. Leigh went on with her letter.

Ten minutes after, the gong sounded, and Edith came down in her pinafore, ready for her dinner.

‘Well!’ said Mrs. Leigh, ‘did you put the cage in the window?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Edith, ‘but Dicky’s not come back. The cage is quite empty still. I’m afraid Dicky will never come home again, mamma.’

And Edith looked so sad that her mamma took her quickly in to dinner, and gave her some mince and mashed potato.

Now Edith was very hungry, so she ate away, and began to talk.

CHAPTER IV.

‘MAMMA, will you tell me now, that what you said?’

Mrs. Leigh was puzzled for a minute, and then remembered.

‘You mean my other plan for finding Dicky, if he did not come back. Can’t you guess what it is?’

No, Edith couldn’t.

She tried, and tried, but could not think what it could be.

I wonder if any of the little boys and girls who are reading this story will be able to guess?

‘Don’t you remember, Edith, something we saw in our walk this morning?’

‘The poor little girl, mamma, with the sad eyes?’

‘No, I don’t mean her. Try again.’

‘The fruit-shop, perhaps?’

‘No; try again.’

Edith tried to think, but could not make out what her mamma meant.

Suddenly she jumped off her chair, and clapped her hands.

‘You mean the funny man, mamma, the man who calls out:

“Lost!
Lost!!
Lost!!!”’

'Ah! you have guessed right,' said Mrs. Leigh.
'Yes, I mean him; we will go and tell him to call
out all over the town, that our poor little Dicky is

"Lost!
Lost!!
Lost!!!"

Then if anyone has found him, he will be brought
here directly. Do you understand?

'Oh yes!' Edith quite understood, and wanted
to be off at once.

'What will he cry out, mamma?'

'Well,' said Mrs. Leigh, 'first of all he will cry
out

"Lost!
Lost!!
Lost!!!"

Then what, Edith?

'I know,' said Edith.

"Lost!
Lost!!
Lost!!!"

our *poor* little Dicky!

'Well! we shall see,' said her mamma. 'We'll
go and tell him what has happened, and then leave
it to him to cry out what he likes.'

So Edith and her mamma went out again to the
street where they had seen the town-crier in the
morning, but he was not there.

They hunted first in one place, and then in
another, but they could not find him.

All of a sudden they heard a bell.

Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !

‘Oh! there he is!’ said Edith; ‘look there, mamma, at the end of the street.’

Sure enough, there he was, with his bell in his hand, and a crowd of boys round him. Even at that distance Edith could hear quite plainly :

‘Lost !
On the Beach !
A GENEVA WATCH ! !’

Mrs. Leigh and Edith went up the street as quickly as they could, and as soon as he had finished his speech, Mrs. Leigh beckoned to him to come and speak to her. He came out of the crowd, and she told him the story.

Edith could not hear what either of them said, as they were both so much taller than her. Presently, the town-crier went back to the crowd, and Mrs. Leigh asked Edith if she would like to stop and hear what he was going to say.

Edith of course said she would like it very much, so holding her mamma’s hand tight, she went into the crowd and waited.

‘Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !
Lost !
Lost !!
Lost !!!
Flown out of window !
A LITTLE CANARY !’

'That's mine,' Edith could not help saying to a little boy standing next her, and she felt so proud and delighted, that she quite forgot what a sad thing it was to lose her poor little dicky-bird.

'Whoever will bring it
To 9, Bouverie Square,
Will have Five Shillings
REWARD !'

Oh dear! what a shout! Edith had not expected it would be so loud, and she nearly screamed, for she was so near the man that his voice quite went through her head.

But she laughed because all the rest did, and then she stayed quite still, to hear what would come next.

For she quite expected someone in the crowd to call out : 'Here it is! I've got it! I've found it.'

But no one spoke, and after a minute the town-crier moved on, and a good many boys followed him. The rest of the crowd went their different ways, and Edith and her mamma were left standing alone in the middle of the street.

'I'm afraid no one has found Dicky, mamma,' said Edith, sadly.

'Oh! my darling, you must not be in such a hurry. You know the man will have to go into a great many streets before everyone in Folkestone hears that Dicky is lost. We must not expect to know till this evening, at any rate, if then.'

'What a long time!' sighed Edith.

'It won't seem long,' said Mrs. Leigh; 'we shall

not go home till tea time, and meantime you may have a donkey, if you like.'

Edith was delighted at the thoughts of a ride on a donkey, and she ran on towards the stand to choose a nice one.

CHAPTER V.

LEAVING Edith to enjoy her donkey-ride, we must now go back to poor Mrs. Brown and her little girl, who you will remember Edith so unaccountably lost sight of in the morning.

You will remember that she left them standing outside the shop-door while she ran in to ask her mamma to give them some money.

You will remember also that when she came back, bringing her mamma with her, the barrow and Mrs. Brown and the little girl had all disappeared, and that poor Edith was much disappointed, and also puzzled as to what could have become of them.

Well! you will know now what Edith was longing to find out, for I am going to tell you.

Directly Edith had gone into the shop, Nancy's mother spied a boy beckoning to her from the corner of a little side street, and, being afraid to lose a chance of selling some of her vegetables, she hurried after him.

She turned the corner, and followed him up the

little street, where she found the wife of a tobacconist waiting at her door to buy a cauliflower.

The cauliflower cost a penny, and the tobacconist's wife gave a sixpence and asked for change.

Poor Mrs. Brown having only sold a vegetable marrow all day, had not got any change, so the boy had to be sent to get some.

All this made a delay, and meanwhile Mrs. Leigh and Edith had passed down the big street looking for the barrow, and had not been able to find it.

Then by the time Mrs. Brown and Nancy had got back into the street, Edith and her mamma had got still further away, and had joined the crowd round the town-crier.

So it was not very likely that while they were listening to him, and that tremendously loud

'Lost !
Lost !!
Lost !!!'

was sounding in their ears, they should hear poor Mrs. Brown's little cry of

'Any pears or nuts to-day !
Chickweed and groundsel for singing-birds !
Or turf for larks !'

You know the story of the Three Bears ?

Well, the town-crier's voice was as much louder than Mrs. Brown's as the big bear's was louder than the little wee bear's.

'Who has been lying on my bed ?'

'Who has been lying on my bed ?'

So you may just fancy.

Mrs. Brown soon left the upper part of the town, and went down to the streets where the poorer people live. And when she had been right through these she turned out of the town into the high road by the railway that led to her home.

Till then she had been so busy looking up at the windows, and in at the doors, so as to be sure of seeing anyone who might put their heads out and cry 'Stop! we want to buy,' that she had not noticed how slowly little Nancy was following her, nor how pale and tired she looked. But now she began to wonder why the child hung behind so, and stopped and turned round.

'Are you tired, Nannie?'

'No, mammy, not so *very*.'

For Nancy was a patient little girl, and never complained or made a fuss about herself.

'Hungry, then?'

'No—not so very, *very*.'

'Feeling ill, my dearie?'

'No, mammy, not so ve-ry *v-e-r-y*.'

But poor little Nancy's voice was very shaky.

'Why, you're crying, child. What is it? Tell mammy.'

And Mrs. Brown left the barrow in the road, sat down by the wayside, and took Nancy in her arms.

'Now tell mammy all about it.'

The funny thing was, that just at that moment, in the big house in Bouverie Square, Mrs. Leigh was taking *her* little girl into *her* lap, and trying to find

out why *she* was crying, and asking her—not if she was hungry or tired, or feeling ill—but if she had tumbled down on the stairs, or been frightened at anything, or not been able to find her nurse.

And Edith was answering very much in the same way as Nancy, or rather not answering at all, but crying, and crying on.

Now Edith was crying because she had lost her canary, but Nancy was crying because she felt weak, and ill, and hungry and miserable.

She said, 'No, mammy, not so *very*,' when her mother asked her if she was tired, or hungry, or ill, because she really did not exactly know, poor child, what it was that was making her cry.

The truth was she had had very little to eat for several days, and had been tramping about the streets after the barrow ever since six o'clock that morning without any dinner—so it was no wonder she felt weak and sad and ready to cry.

What a difference between Edith sitting down to her mince and mashed potato, and poor little hungry, dinnerless Nancy!

And yet I dare say Edith thought no one could be more miserable than she was.

It is often like this with all children ; you think no one is so unhappy as you are, when you cannot get what you want, or are disappointed about something ; but if you only knew how much better off you are than many poor little children, who *never* get what they want, and are disappointed all day

long, you would feel quite ashamed of making miseries out of *your* little troubles.

Perhaps if Edith could have seen poor Nancy lying in her mother's arms by the roadside, she would have felt ashamed of crying so much, just because a little bird had flown away.

Still, we must not be too hard upon Edith, because she *had* something to cry about ; for it was a sad thing to lose her dear little canary ; but really some little boys and girls cry for no reason at all ; perhaps because somebody says something they don't like, or because they cannot do exactly what they want, or some foolish reason of that kind. And it is for such children that I cannot feel at all sorry, and for whom I can make no excuse.

It is the same thing about little hurts as it is about little troubles.

I dare say some of you, when you tumble down and graze your elbows or your knees, or bump your foreheads, make a great fuss, particularly if there is a little blood to show.

But just think for a moment of the cuts and bruises, and even broken bones, that children get who are not taken such care of as you are, and children too who have no mammas or nurses near, to put on pomade-divine, or soft rag, or sticking-plaster.

Next time you hurt yourself, and are going to make a great to-do about it, just think of all this. And the next time, too, that you have a little cold, or headache, and are inclined to make a fuss about

it, and to think yourself very bad, give a thought to the many poor little sick children in miserable beds, who are so much worse than you, and yet have so much less care and attention.

Now we must go back to poor Mrs. Brown, sitting by the wayside, with her sick child in her lap.

‘What am I to do for you, my poor little girl?’ she said, as she rocked Nancy to and fro in her arms; ‘could you eat a little bit of bread if I were to buy it for you, or do you feel so bad that you would like to go home to bed?’

‘I should like to go home,’ said Nancy, ‘only then you won’t be able to sell.’

Now Nancy was longing to go home and lie down, only she was such a brave unselfish little girl that she was ready to give up her wish for her mother’s sake.

‘I may as well go home,’ said Mrs. Brown; ‘I don’t see that I’m likely to sell anything more to-day. I’ve been through all the most likely streets, and nobody seems inclined to buy. I’m beginning to think my vegetables are not fine enough to take people’s fancy, for I seem to sell less and less every day. Of course I can’t afford to buy the best. I sometimes think I’ll give up the barrow altogether, and take to some other way of making a living; but what to take to I don’t know. Eh! Nancy?’

Nancy didn’t answer, and didn’t seem to be listening.

Her mother looked at her, to see if she was asleep.

She was lying back with her eyes shut, and a faint smile was playing over her face.

‘What are you smiling at, Nancy?’

‘Hush! mother,’ whispered Nancy, still keeping her eyes closed. ‘I’m listening to a little bird that keeps singing, singing so sweetly! It’s so pretty, mammy dear!’

‘Bird singing!’ repeated Mrs. Brown, ‘you must be dreaming, child, there are no singing birds now; why, it’s October, you know. It’s a boy whistling you hear, or a barrow organ, or something of that sort.’

‘But, mammy! do just listen, for I hear it so plainly, and I *know* it’s a bird. Hark! there it is again.’

Sure enough, the trilling notes of a little bird sounded in the still air. The song seemed to come from the road, and yet there were no trees near.

‘It’s very strange,’ said Mrs. Brown, ‘it *is* a bird, and no mistake. It must be near the barrow; that’s where the sound comes from. I’ll go and see if there’s anything there.’

‘Take care, mammy,’ said little Nancy, in an agony; ‘go softly, or perhaps you’ll frighten it away. Carry me with you, I want so much to come too.’

Mrs. Brown took the little girl in her arms, and went on tiptoe up to where the barrow was standing in the road. There was a large heap of cauliflower flowers which at first prevented their seeing any-

thing, but Nancy eagerly peeped right over the top of it.

And there, perched on the side of the cart, pecking away at the groundsel, and seeming thoroughly to enjoy his meal, was—a little canary!

‘Oh! mammy, mammy! what a dear little yellow bird! Oh! won’t you catch it and let me take it home?’

‘Take it home!’ exclaimed poor Mrs. Brown, in astonishment; ‘why, what in the world are we to do with it? We’ve no cage, no seed, no nothing.’

‘There’s the old broken cage in the shed, mammy, where the magpie used to be. Couldn’t we put him in there, if it was mended up?’

‘But the food, my lamb; you forget it must eat. And how are we to feed it—we who can hardly feed ourselves?’

‘The groundsel, mammy,’ said Nancy, eagerly; ‘there’s plenty of it, and he likes it. See how he’s pecking at it now.’

‘But he can’t live always on that, dearie. It’s not a field bird, you know. It’s a cage-bird, accustomed to rape-seed and canary-seed and I don’t know what. Besides, it doesn’t belong to us. It must have got out of its cage by accident.’

‘Oh! don’t say no, mammy. It’ll die if we leave it here.’

And Nancy burst into tears.

Mrs. Brown had been going to make all sorts of objections still, but Nancy’s pleading voice and streaming eyes made her change her mind.

She was frightened to see how weak and ill the child seemed. She knew Nancy must be feeling very bad to cry so easily, for generally she was the most patient little girl in the world, and the bravest.

The only thing she thought of now was how to get home as quickly as possible, and put Nancy to bed and get her something to eat.

So, without more ado, she put her down, went quickly up to the little bird, and caught him in her hand.

He fluttered and chirruped a little at first, but soon became quiet, for he was, as you know, a tame little fellow, and accustomed to be handled.

Mrs. Brown brought him to Nancy, who eagerly held out her little pinafore for him.

She then lifted the child, canary and all, on to the barrow, and as quickly as possible wheeled them all home.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. BROWN'S 'home' consisted of one little room in a little cottage belonging to a poor old market-gardener and his wife.

They were good old people, and very kind to Nancy and her mother ; but they were very, very poor, and it was as much as they could do to feed and clothe themselves ; so they were not able to help Mrs. Brown much, though I am sure if they had been rich they would have done so directly.

Old King, as the market-gardener was called, supplied Mrs. Brown with the vegetables and groundsel that she carried about on her barrow. They grew in his little garden, and what he did not consider good enough for the market, he sold cheap to her.

Now, as his finest vegetables were not very fine, you may imagine that those he sold cheap to Mrs. Brown were not very much worth having ; but still, as she could not afford any better, she was glad enough to buy these ; and then old King was so kind about waiting to be paid for them, if Mrs. Brown, as too often happened, had made very little money in the day.

There was a little shed in the garden where old King kept his tools, and where he allowed Mrs. Brown to keep her barrow at night.

This old shed was Nancy's favourite playing-place, and she had quite as many happy games there, when she was well and strong, as Edith had in her garden and her summer-house in her beautiful old home in Kent.

You see both Edith and Nancy were companionless children, and neither of them knew any of the fun of romps with brothers and sisters out of doors, or of games of shop and keeping house, and playing at trains at home.

It was from being so much in the shed that little Nancy remembered directly about the old broken bird-cage, for she had seen it hanging there almost as long as she could remember, and had often

amused herself for hours, watching the money-spiders making their webs between its bars, till at last it seemed as if they joined them all together.

The cage had belonged to Nancy's father, who had been a fisherman, and who had been drowned at sea one stormy night many years ago. He used to keep a magpie in it, but the magpie had pined away, and died soon after its master, for grief, Mrs. Brown used to say, with tears in her eyes; but others said it was for want of the care and attention the dead fisherman used to bestow upon it, and for which poor Mrs. Brown, doubly poor since her husband's death, had no time.

Anyhow, it had been dead so long that Nancy did not remember the cage otherwise than as an empty, battered old thing, hanging on an old rusty nail in the darkest part of the shed.

So this was the new dwelling-place waiting for master Dicky when he arrived at the little cottage, squeezed up tight in Nancy's pinafore.

Mrs. Brown carried the child into the little room, and laid her down on the bed.

Then, at Nancy's earnest request, she went to the shed to look for the bird-cage.

It was, as we have said, in such a dark part, that it was some time before she found it. She hunted about in all the dark holes and corners, and it was not till she had knocked her head against it that she discovered it hanging on the wall.

She brought it to the light, and dusted it with her apron, brushing away remorselessly all the

money-spiders, and the webs they had spun with such care.

It was a big wooden cage, not the least suited to a canary, but though it was very old and battered, it had no holes in it.

'It's better than I thought,' Mrs. Brown said to herself, and she carried it off to the little room where Nancy lay expecting it.

The child was pleased to see it, but she seemed too faint and tired to speak, or to sit up to look at it.

Mrs. Brown put it down, and came and took Dicky out of Nancy's pinafore and popped him into the cage.

I think he must have found it rather hot and uncomfortable in Nancy's pinafore, for he did seem so very pleased to get into the cage. He hopped about and gave several little 'To-wheets!' 'To-wheets!'

Little Nancy opened her eyes and smiled at the sound, but she soon shut them again, for she was very tired.

Mrs. Brown put the cage where the child could see it, gave Dicky some water and some groundsel, and then undressed Nancy and put her to bed.

'Would you like a little milk and some bread, my lamb?' she said, as she laid the little sick girl on her pillow.

Nancy smiled and nodded.

'Well! I'll go and buy you some then. I shan't be long, and Dicky will keep you company while I'm away.'

But when she came back with the food, Nancy was too ill to eat it; she just tasted the milk, but the bread she could not touch.

She lay back on her pillow with her eyes closed, and seemed to wish to go to sleep.

Mrs. Brown darkened the room, and thinking that if Nancy went to sleep now, she would perhaps wake up hungry a little later, she put the milk carefully by in a little cup, and covered Nancy up. She was going to put Dicky outside the door, for fear he should chirrup and disturb the child; but the moment she put her hand on the cage, Nancy opened her eyes, and their look seemed to beg that he might not be taken out of her sight.

Dicky behaved very well, and was very quiet.

The fact was, finding the room dark, he thought night had arrived, so he popped his head under his wing and went to sleep too.

But Nancy didn't sleep as long as Dicky, neither did she wake up and eat, as her mother had hoped and expected.

She tossed about and coughed all night long, and was so ill in the morning that Mrs. Brown got old King to go and fetch the doctor as soon as he was up.

The doctor came and looked rather grave, and said Nancy would be ill for many days, and that Mrs. Brown must take great care of her.

She was ill, he said, from being so tired, and not having enough good food to eat.

She would not want much to eat for the next

week or ten days, he said ; but after that, when she was getting better, she would be very hungry, and would have to have beef-tea and milky puddings, and all those kind of things.

Poor Mrs. Brown ! She sat for some time after the doctor had gone, with her face hidden in her hands, wondering what she was to do ; and she could not help crying just a little quite quietly to herself.

For if Nancy was going to be ill, of course she would not be able to leave her ; and if she did not go out with the barrow, how was she ever to make the money with which the beef-tea and the milky puddings must be bought ? She felt very sad ; so she opened her Bible and began to read.

And these were the words she read. ' Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed . . . for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.'

Mrs. Brown's eyes filled with tears of joy as she read, for the words seemed to promise her that God would provide for Nancy, since He *knew* that she needed many things.

And she tried to read some more, for she wanted comfort sadly : but her eyes were dim and the room was dark, so she went to the window to see more clearly.

' Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. . . '

The room *was* so very dark that she stopped

CHAPTER VII.

AT last Nancy began to get better, and to be able to have a little light in her room, and to take notice of what was going on round her.

The first thing she asked was for Dicky to be put on the bed close to her, that she might see him hopping about in his cage.

Very soon he learnt to know her, or else perhaps he mistook her for his own little mistress, because little girls in bed are very much alike, for he began to kiss her through the bars of his cage, and do all the other little tricks Edith had taught him. Nancy loved him more and more every day, and her mother often used to say she was sure Nancy would not have got well near so quickly if it had not been for Dicky.

Mrs. Brown was grieved to see, when the light was first let into the room again, how very thin both the child and the bird had grown. She feared Dicky was beginning to miss all the seed and sand and sugar he was used to, though she had done her best to spare a penny every now and then to buy him a little canary-seed, for she had felt very grateful to the little bird for the use he had been to her during Nancy's illness.

The time had now quite come for Nancy to have the beef tea and the milky puddings. She was getting very hungry, and constantly asked for food. So, as she was well enough to be left a little, Mrs.

Brown made up her mind one Sunday evening that she would go out with her barrow again the next day, and try to make a little money.

She went down to old King the first thing on Monday morning, and asked him if he would let her have some pears, nuts, groundsel, etc.

She told him at the same time that she could not pay him anything for them now, as Nancy's illness had cost her every penny she had, either in the house or in the savings' bank, but that she hoped to be able to pay him that evening if she was pretty lucky during the day.

Old King was very kind about it, but said he hoped she would not fail to pay him that night, as he was particularly poor himself just now.

Mrs. Brown willingly promised to do her very best, filled her barrow, and then went up to say good-bye to Nancy.

The child was sitting up in bed talking to Dicky, whose cage was on her bed.

She was better, but very weak ; and looked as if she wanted soup, and jelly, and wine, and all sorts of good things that her poor mother could not afford to give her.

'I'm so hungry, mammy, and Dicky too,' she said smiling, but in a very weak voice.

'I'm glad to hear it, my dearie, for it shows you're better ; and now I'm going off to sell as much as ever I can, and get you a nice bit of meat to make you some broth.'

'And Dicky some seed, mammy.'

'Yes, Dicky some seed,' said Mrs. Brown, as she kissed Nancy's little pale face. 'If you want anything, give Mrs. King a call. She's promised to look after you while I'm away; God bless you, dearie.'

'Good-bye, dear mammy,' said Nancy.

'Sw—eet!' said Dicky.

'That's Dicky's good-bye,' smiled Nancy. And Mrs. Brown started off.

She was glad to feel the fresh sea-air in her face after being shut up so long, and the walk into the town did her good. She soon found herself in the familiar streets, passing all the shops and houses that she had not seen since the day Nancy was taken ill.

She fell into her old ways again quite naturally, looking up at the windows and in at the doors so as to be sure of not missing anyone who might want to buy, and calling out as usual—'Any pears or nuts to-day; chickweed and groundsel for singing-birds, or turf for larks!'

It was not near such a fine day as it had been when she was last out selling. It was cold and damp, and inclined to rain. There were not many people out, and those there were did not stand about looking at the barrow, as sometimes happened, but walked straight on, as if they thought it too unpleasant a day for dawdling.

Mrs. Brown began to get rather sad as half-an-hour, and then an hour went by, and nobody bought anything of her. She went at last to the little side

street where she had sold the cauliflower to the tobacconist's wife, in the hope that she might persuade her to buy another.

The woman was at her door, and Mrs. Brown hurried up to her: but alas! when she got there, she found that *another* barrow was standing at the door, and that the tobacconist's wife was buying vegetables of *another* person.

Poor Mrs. Brown! she did just complain a little at this; but the tobacconist's wife answered that it was so long since she had seen anything of her, that she had made up her mind she had given up her business, and so had been obliged to transfer her custom to someone else.

Nancy's mother turned away without a word. She could not steady her voice to explain about her sick child, and even if she did, what good would it do?

Back again into the big streets; up and down, up and down, wearily crying—'Any pears or nuts to-day; chickweed and groundsel for singing-birds, or turf for larks!'

She felt, as she watched the people hurrying along, that she could kneel down to them and *beg* them to buy.

Hour after hour passed, and she sold nothing at all: not even a pear or a bit of groundsel.

She was at her wits' end.

She could not go home till she had made some money, for Nancy must have her broth, or she would get ill again. And yet how little use it seemed staying out.

She looked sadly at the rosy-faced children going by with their nurses on their way home to a good tea, and thought of her little pale Nancy at home, waiting for the food that did not seem likely to come.

As she stood, a little boy and girl with their nurse stopped for a minute and looked at the barrow.

'Oh, Nana!' said the little boy, 'how I should like to buy some of that turf for my lark!'

'You've no money this week, you know, Master Edward,' said the nurse. 'I think you forget that you got so few marks from Miss Cust last week that you had no pennies on Saturday.'

The little boy had evidently quite forgotten. He looked very grave. 'Oh dear! oh dear!' he sighed, 'how I wish I'd been more attentive, and tried harder!'

Mrs. Brown wished so too. She would have been so thankful if the little boy could have bought some of her turf.

By not doing what is right we punish other people as well as ourselves. If the little boy had been good at his lessons he would have got his pennies, the lark would have got his turf, Mrs. Brown would have made some money, and Nancy would have got her soup.

'Don't cry, Eddy,' said the little girl to her brother. 'I got my pennies this week, you know, and I'll buy you the turf.'

'Why, Miss Amy,' said the nurse, 'you spent nearly all your pennies on the beach just now,

buying shells and things you didn't the least want. I'm sure you have not enough left for the turf. I told you at the time that you wouldn't know what to do with them when you'd got them, and that it was a pity to waste your money on them, but you always want to buy everything you see.'

The little girl looked very much ashamed, and said nothing.

'Still, I think you've got *one* left,' said the nurse; 'at least, I know the man gave you some change.'

The little girl began hunting in her pocket, and even turned it inside out, but there was no penny there.

'What was that you were throwing about on the beach?' said the nurse. 'You were tossing something up in the air.'

'I'm *dreadfully* afraid it was the penny,' said the little girl, blushing, 'and I think I dropped it. What a great bother! I wish I hadn't.'

'I hope it will be a lesson to you,' said the nurse, gravely, 'not to be so careless with money, when there are so many poor people starving for want of it. It seems dreadful for children to be tossing about and losing what would make many a poor person happy.'

The children looked at Mrs. Brown's sad face, and felt what their nurse said was true. They were very much disappointed, and walked on without speaking.

Nancy's mother was dreadfully disappointed too. It was getting late, and beginning to rain. She felt

it was no use staying out any longer, and yet, how could she go back to Nancy and old King without having made a farthing?

No soup for Nancy, no seed for Dicky, no money to pay old King. And, as the thought of her sick child lying in her bed, weak and hungry, came upon her, the tears rushed into the mother's eyes, and quite in despair she leant against the barrow and covered her face with her hands.

But even as she wept, the words which had comforted her before, when she was in trouble, came into her head to comfort her again.

'Behold the fowls of the air . . . Are ye not much better than they? . . . Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.'

Yes, God knew that Nancy wanted soup and nourishment; He had taken care of Dicky, He would take care of Nancy too.

Soothed by the promise of the Bible, Mrs. Brown raised her head and wiped away her tears. And as she did so there fell upon her ear the sound of a clanging bell.

Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !

Filled with a sudden thought, she followed the sound as quickly as she could wheel the barrow along, and turned the corner of the street.

Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !
Ting—a—ring !

‘Lost ! Lost ! Lost !
Flown out of Window,
A LITTLE CANARY !!!’

Mrs. Brown jumped as if she had been shot, not at the sudden shout, but with the sudden hope that filled her breast. Pressing both hands upon her heart, to still its beating, she strained every nerve to hear and take in what was coming.

‘Whoever will bring it
To
9, Bouverie Square,
Will have Five Shillings
REWARD ! !’

The small crowd of boys round the town-crier jumped and laughed as usual ; the town-crier himself moved on, and Mrs. Brown was left standing alone in the street.

I leave you children to imagine how she felt.

I leave you to picture to yourselves how her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her face shone with joy.

Five shillings !

Why, five shillings to her, at that moment, was like a hundred pounds, for would not five shillings buy *everything* she wanted, and could a hundred thousand pounds do more ?

Broth for Nancy for days and days and days to come ; milky puddings for as long as she would

want them ; money to pay old King over and over again ; sand, seed, and even sugar for Dicky,

‘Oh, thank God ! thank God !’ she exclaimed, when she could find voice to speak. ‘He knew I had need of all these things.’

She must hurry home as fast as her legs could carry her. She must not lose a moment in fetching Dicky and taking him to Bouverie Square.

In another hour the five shillings would be hers, and Nancy would have her hot soup before bedtime.

You never saw anyone look happier than Mrs. Brown, as she trudged along the wet streets.

It began to rain rather heavily, but she did not feel as if she cared about it, though she had on a thin shawl and no umbrella.

All she thought of was how to get home as quickly as possible.

Hot and breathless, she arrived at the little cottage, and hurried indoors.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘THE child’s asleep,’ said old Mrs. King, looking out from her door. ‘She’s sadly in need of some broth, I fancy ; for she’s weak-like, and very hungry. She’s eaten all the bread and drank all the milk you left for her.’

‘She’s going to get plenty now,’ said Mrs. Brown,

joyfully. 'I'm very thankful to you for minding her. Has she wearied for me?'

'She would have wearied, I think, if it had not been for the little bird,' answered the old woman; 'but he seems a real companion for her. She's been playing with him off and on all day. Nothing would do but the cage must be on the bed, and she's been kissing him through the bars. Bless her heart! it was pretty to see her. *Kiss, she* calls it, but to *me* it seems more of a peck; for she made me put my face down to see "what a sweet kiss he gave," but he made my lip bleed, I know. But I won't keep you, Mrs. Brown, for she ought to have some food soon, and you'll be wanting to get it ready.'

Mrs. Brown went upstairs rather slowly after this, and she did not have quite such a happy face as she had had before.

For the old woman's words made her remember what in her first great joy she had forgotten; and that was, that the news she was bringing would not be altogether good news for Nancy.

She began to dread having to tell the child that Dicky must go, for she was afraid that it would make her dreadfully unhappy.

She opened the door very softly, and went in.

Nancy was lying asleep, and Dicky, in his cage close by, was calling 'Sw—eet! Sw—eet!' every moment, as if asking her to wake up and play.

She must have heard his voice in her dreams, for she had a smile on her little thin face. Mrs. Brown

stood at the foot of the bed for a minute, and her face grew very sad.

For, first of all, it struck her how very ill Nancy was looking, and then her heart sank at the thought of having to tell her sad news the moment she woke.

And yet it must be done, and done quickly too, for there was no time to be lost.

It was getting late, and if she did not soon take the canary to Bouverie Square she might find the house shut up; and then there would be no five shillings to-night, and no soup for Nancy.

This thought made her braver than anything else. Food the child must have, and that soon; for she looked terribly pale and weak.

'How would it be?' thought Mrs. Brown to herself, 'if I took Dicky away now while Nancy is asleep, and then tell her afterwards all about it?'

She made up her mind to try. She felt almost like a thief as she crept on tiptoe to the bed, and softly moved away the bird-cage.

She walked to the door, cage in hand, creeping along like a cat, afraid almost to breathe, for fear of waking Nancy. She turned the handle very, very softly, and was almost out of the room, when what should Dicky do but begin to sing!

And he sang so loud and so clear that Nancy stirred in her sleep, and then opened her eyes.

'Dicky,' she said, missing him in a moment from her side, 'where are you?'

'Here he is, dearie,' said Mrs. Brown, hastily re-

turning into the room, and she put the cage back on the bed.

She sat down by Nancy's side and began to talk, hoping that the child would ask her a lot of questions about what she had been doing all day, and whether she had bought any seed for Dicky; because then it would be easier to tell her that Dicky must go to a place where he would have as much seed, and sand, and sugar as he wanted: and Nancy was such a kind, unselfish little girl, that perhaps, for Dicky's sake, she would be glad he should go.

But Nancy did not seem inclined to talk, or to ask questions. She shut her eyes again directly she found Dicky was safe at her side, and seemed inclined to go to sleep.

What *was* Mrs. Brown to do?

It was getting darker every moment, and there was no time to spare. Bouverie Square was a long way off, and if she intended to go, she ought not to delay another moment.

So at last, in despair, she bent over Nancy, and said, rather suddenly:

'Do you know, Nannie, I've found out where Dicky comes from?'

'Yes,' whispered Nancy, in a weak little voice, 'I know too. Mrs. King told me.'

'How in the world should *she* know,' muttered Mrs. Brown to herself, 'and if she knew, why didn't she tell me long ago?'

But she did not say this so that Nancy should hear.

Still, she was very glad to think that Nancy should be a little prepared for what was coming, and she went on more boldly :

‘She told you, did she ? Well, dearie, don’t you think I ought to take him back ?’

‘All that long way, mammy ? Why ! you couldn’t.’

‘It’s not so very far,’ said Mrs. Brown, ‘and the cage is not so very heavy.’

‘But you’d have to go in a ship, mammy.’

‘In a *ship* !’ repeated poor Mrs. Brown, ‘why, you’re dreaming, Nancy dear.’

‘I’m quite awake,’ answered Nancy, ‘but I *know* you’d have to go in a ship, because Mrs. King said so. It would take you many days and nights to get there, she said, tossing about on the sea all the time.’

‘Why ! where in the world did she say Dicky came from, then ?’ exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Brown.

‘All the way from the Canary Islands,’ answered Nancy, sleepily ; ‘such a long way off, mammy. Out by a place called Africa, I think she said.’

‘Bless my heart !’ said Mrs. Brown, ‘I didn’t mean *that* ! I meant I had found out where he had come from the day we found him ; how he had flown out of a window in Bouverie Square, and how the people he belongs to are offering five shillings reward to anyone who will bring him back. And don’t you see, my little Nannie, that I think

I ought to take him back, seeing that he rightfully belongs to them, and not to us.'

No answer from Nancy, no sound, while her mother talked on, till Mrs. Brown was interrupted by a great sob, and hastily pulling down the sheets, she found Nancy's pillow wet with tears, and the child lying on her face, quite choked with trying to keep down her sobs.

Then she began to cough, and between coughing and crying, and being so weak, she got quite exhausted, and poor Mrs. Brown was frightened.

She saw Nancy was too ill still to understand that, as the bird belonged to someone else, it was not right to keep it; so all she could do was to promise her that if only she would stop crying, she would say no more about taking Dicky away.

Nancy stopped directly; and weak and worn-out as she was, she soon fell asleep.

Mrs. Brown wondered what was to be done now!

She felt that it was wrong to keep the canary's master or mistress in ignorance of his safety another night after he or she had been searching for him nearly a fortnight.

She felt also quite sure that in the morning, Nancy, who was always such a good little girl, would let the bird go quietly; and so at last she made up her mind to go to Bouverie Square, tell her story, and promise to bring back Dicky the next day.

They would be cruel people indeed, if, after

hearing about her sick child, they still insisted on having their bird back to-night.

And if they were kind, was there not a chance of their giving her the five shillings at once?

She knelt down and prayed that God would soften their hearts towards her; and then she put on her bonnet and went down to ask Mrs. King to give a look at Nancy while she was away.

Out again into the cold, wet streets, with a thin shawl and no umbrella.

It was nearly dark before she got to 9, Bouverie Square.

She rang the bell with a trembling hand, for she was getting very nervous as to what kind of person Dicky's owner might prove to be. She hoped very much it might turn out he belonged to a lady, and particularly a lady with children of her own, as then she would be sure to be sorry for her little Nancy.

The door was opened by a footman.

'Can I see the lady of the house?'

'I don't know. What do you want?'

'Then there *is* a lady,' thought Mrs. Brown to herself.

'Tell the lady, please,' she said out loud, 'that a woman wishes to see her who has found her canary-bird.'

The footman instantly opened the door wide, and told Mrs. Brown to sit down in the hall, while he went to tell his mistress.

He soon came back, and showed her into an

empty room, saying the lady would be down in a few moments.

Mrs. Brown looked eagerly round the little room after the footman was gone, as if she thought she could judge by its appearance whether the lady were kind or not.

There was a doll on the sofa, a little girl's straw hat on the table. Her hopes rose. 'If she has a little girl, she will feel for mine,' she thought to herself.

In another moment the door opened, and Nancy's mother was face to face with Edith's mamma.

CHAPTER IX.

AND now we must see what Edith has been doing all this time.

We left her running on to the stand to choose a nice donkey.

She found only one left, so of course she had not much choice.

However, he was a very nice donkey, and not a bit tired or lazy, so she had a capital gallop on the road that leads from Folkestone to Sandgate.

It was past five o'clock before she got home.

After tea she went down into the drawing-room, where her papa and mamma were sitting.

'Has anyone been with Dicky, mamma?' was her first question.

‘Not yet,’ answered Mrs. Leigh.

‘Oh dear! oh dear!’ said Edith, ‘and the night’s coming on, and what will poor Dicky do?’

‘What’s all this?’ said Mr. Leigh. ‘Come here, and tell me all about it.’

Edith got on her papa’s lap, and began telling him the sad story of the loss of poor Dicky, and how they had told the town-crier to call it out all over Folkestone, and how, *still*, Dicky had not been found.

And the story took so long telling, and her papa had so many questions to ask before he could quite understand it all, that bed-time came directly Edith had finished.

She begged hard to be allowed to sit up a little longer, just in case someone should come to the door with Dicky, and her mamma gave her leave.

At every ring at the door Edith jumped up and ran to the window, and every time it was a fresh disappointment.

First it was a parcel, and then it was the post-man, and then it was the newspaper-boy; and at last she decided to stay at the window altogether, so as to see the people before they got up to the door.

Her papa came and stood with her, and together they watched everybody that went by, to see if they were going to ring at the bell.

But although there were several more rings, no one came with the canary, and at last it got too dark to see, and Mrs. Leigh said Edith must really not stay up any longer.

Poor Edith began to cry, and said she could not bear to think of Dicky all by himself in the dark, without any cage to sleep in, nor any food to eat.

But you children who have read the other part of this story, know very well that Edith need not have made herself unhappy, because Dicky *had* got a cage to sleep in, and plenty of groundsel to eat.

However, she could not guess that, and knew nothing about little Nancy and her mother ; so she went up to bed with a heavy heart, and begged her nurse to draw the curtain over the empty bird-cage, for she could not bear to see it.

The next morning she went out with her mamma directly after breakfast, and they followed the town-crier, and asked him if he had heard anything of the canary.

Of course he said no, and Edith got sadder than ever.

There seemed nothing but disappointment for her, for when, after talking to the town-crier, she and her mamma went to see if they could find the 'little girl with the sorrowful eyes' that Edith had taken such a fancy to, I need not say she was nowhere to be seen.

The day passed on, and the evening came, and still there was no news of Dicky. Edith and her papa stood at the window till seven o'clock, watching the passers-by, but of course no one brought the canary. It was just like the evening before : first some parcels, then the postman, then the

newspaper-boy, and Edith went to bed almost more unhappy than she had been yesterday.

And so it went on day after day.

Poor Edith! Dicky was a sad loss to her, for as she had no brothers nor sisters, she was accustomed to make him quite a companion. He was, as you know, her favourite of all her pets; she loved all his pretty little ways, and she missed so the kiss he used to give her every morning through the bars of his cage.

Above all, she sadly missed the beautiful song that he used to pour out to her every morning directly she was awake.

At last she began to be afraid something terrible must have happened to Dicky.

This idea took hold of her on the very Monday that Mrs. Brown was selling in the streets for the first time since Nancy's illness.

It so happened that Edith had had rather a long dull afternoon, for it was too damp for her to stay out, and her mamma had been spending the day with some friends of hers.

So Edith had had plenty of time to think about Dicky, and to wonder what could have become of him.

When Mrs. Leigh came home about six o'clock, she found Edith in the nursery, standing on a chair at the window, mournfully watching the rain-drops trickling down the window-pane, and when Mrs. Leigh came close, she saw drops, that were not rain-drops, trickling down Edith's face.

Mrs. Leigh did not say anything, but she put her arm round the little girl, and gave her a kiss.

Edith hid her face on her mamma's shoulder.

'I'm so dull without Dicky, mamma,' she said.

'And is that what makes you cry?' asked her mamma.

'No, not all,' said Edith; 'it's something worse than that.'

'Tell me, darling?'

'I'm so afraid he's been eaten up by some horrid greedy, cruel, wicked cat,' sobbed Edith, 'and I can't help crying whenever I think of it.'

Mrs. Leigh felt very sorry for the poor little girl, and hardly knew how to comfort her, for she was very much afraid herself that something dreadful had happened to Dicky. It seemed so strange, if he *had* been found, that they should have heard nothing of him for ten days.

'Oh, mamma! mamma! I hate cats. I should like to kill them all, and then they couldn't eat our dear little birds; why *should* they, when they've got so many other nice things to eat—cat's meat, and all sorts of delicious things?'

'Well, darling, it is their nature, you know, and we must not be any more angry with them than we might be with ourselves for eating chickens and sheep, and even poor little pigeons. You might just as well say papa and I ought to be killed for having rabbit soup for dinner to-night, when there are so many other nice things we might have, as

that poor cats are to be killed for eating their natural food. Which is most cruel, Edith, to kill a cat, or to kill a bird? I think my little girl is the cruellest of all,' she said, laughing; 'for she wants to kill *all* cats because she fancies one cat has killed her little bird. Have you been thinking about this all day, Edie?'

'Yes,' said Edith, sadly, 'all day long, except when I've thought of two other things.'

'And what were they, darling?'

'That Dicky had perhaps been blown into the sea,' said Edith, with a quavering voice, 'and drowned quite dead; or else that some naughty person had found him, and sold him to some horrid bird-man, who had killed him and stuffed him, and stuck him up in his shop window. I'm so afraid some day I shall see Dicky fixed on a false branch, with wire feet and bead eyes, and it makes me quite afraid to look into any shop window; and oh! I feel so unhappy, mamma.'

And Edith burst into tears again.

'It is very sad for you, my poor little girl,' said Mrs. Leigh, taking her into her lap; 'you must try and not think about it, if you can.'

'If I could only know he was safe and happy,' sobbed Edith, 'I think I could quite make up my mind never to see him again; but it's so dreadful thinking of all the things that may have happened to him.'

Just at that moment came a tap at the nursery-door.

'A person wishes to see Mrs. Leigh,' said the voice of the footman.

'What a great bother,' said Edith. 'I wanted so to go on talking.'

'I dare say I shan't be long,' said Mrs. Leigh, 'and then I'll come back straight to you. I can't think what anyone can want with me here. I know so few people at Folkestone.'

She got up as she spoke, and went to the door.

'Who is it, Thomas? Do you know?'

'If you please, ma'am,' answered Thomas, 'it's a woman who says she has found Miss Edith's canary.'

Mrs. Leigh turned quickly round to see if Edith was near.

'Edith, darling!' she said joyfully, 'do you hear that? Do you hear what Thomas is saying?'

There was no doubt about Edith having heard. She was standing in the doorway, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks on fire.

'Oh, mamma!' she said, as soon as she could speak, 'do you think it is really true? Has she really found Dicky, my own little Dicky? and do you think he is in her hand? Thomas, had she got him with her? Tell me, quick.'

But Thomas was gone downstairs again.

'Well, I will go and see,' said Mrs. Leigh; 'you wait for me here. I will come back directly, and most likely bring Dicky with me. The woman is sure to have brought him. Of course she would not leave him behind.'

Edith came to the top of the stairs and watched her mamma go downstairs and cross the hall, and go into the drawing-room, and then she flew down the passage to the bed-room nursery, and burst into the room.

‘Nurse! Margaret!’ she said as she rushed in, ‘he’s found! Dicky’s found!’

Nurse was as delighted as Edith could have wished her to be, and Margaret so pleased that she readily agreed to Edith’s request that she would come and dance for joy with her in the day-nursery.

And for about ten minutes she danced Edith round and round, till they were both quite giddy and tired.

Then, as Mrs. Leigh had not come back, they set to work to fill up the time by getting Dicky’s cage ready for him.

They put seed and sand and water, and a great lump of sugar, and hung up the cage in its old place by the window.

‘Only think, Margaret,’ said Edith, as she stood watching the cage gently swinging backwards and forwards, ‘only think that to-night, this very night, Dicky will be there as usual, perching on my finger, and eating out of my hand, and giving me the sweetest of kisses through the bars.’

‘I hope he won’t have forgotten his pretty tricks,’ said Margaret. ‘I wonder where he’s been all this time.’

‘Yes, I wonder,’ said Edith; ‘let’s try and guess. It will make the time seem less long while we’re waiting for mamma to come back.’

So they both began guessing, and most extraordinary guesses they made, of every kind and sort. But neither of them ever went the least near the truth ; neither of them ever dreamt that Dicky had been shut up for ten days in a little girl's sick-room.

'I can't think why he was not sent back sooner,' said Margaret.

'No, no more can I,' said Edith. 'But never mind, Margaret ; he's come back now, and I'm so glad I don't know what to do. Come and dance for joy again.'

So the dance was danced all over again ; and then another visit was made to the bird-cage, to make quite sure everything was there that Dicky could possibly want, and the water was changed because they fancied there was a speck of dust in it.

When all this was done, Edith rather began to wonder why her mamma was so long coming. So she stationed herself on the landing to watch. Then she got tired of that and went back into the nursery, and waited and waited.

Half an hour passed by, and still her mamma did not return.

CHAPTER X.

MEANWHILE, Mrs. Leigh had hurried downstairs and gone into the room where poor Mrs. Brown was so tremblingly awaiting her.

'Well, my good woman,' she said, with a pleasant smile, as she shut the door behind her, 'and so you have brought us news of my little girl's lost canary. But——'

She stopped short, as she looked in vain for the bird.

'I have not brought him, ma'am,' interrupted poor Mrs. Brown, nervously, 'but he's safe and well, and I will bring him the first thing to-morrow, that is, if you will be good enough to wait so long.'

She looked imploringly at Mrs. Leigh as she spoke. She saw at a glance that she was a kind lady, but she was a little frightened to see her evident surprise. Mrs. Leigh certainly *was* surprised.

'She knows nothing about me, and she thinks I don't mean to bring him back,' thought Mrs. Brown to herself. 'She thinks I'm dishonest, and no wonder.'

'How was it you did not bring him with you?' inquired Mrs. Leigh, rather gravely.

'It's a long story, and a sad one,' faltered Mrs. Brown; 'will you let me tell it to you first, before you judge too hardly of me?'

'Surely,' said Mrs. Leigh, gently, touched to see the evident distress under which Mrs. Brown was labouring. 'Sit down, my good woman, and tell me how you came to find the bird, and all about it.'

Reassured by her kindness, Mrs. Brown took courage and related her history from the day on which she had first found Dicky eating groundsel in her cart till the present moment.

She told of the use Dicky had been to her during Nancy's illness, of the wonderful way in which God had used him to keep up her faith and courage, of the sick child's love for the bird, and of the struggle it had been to have to tell her she must part with her little playmate.

'The child was too ill to understand it was wrong to keep what did not belong to her,' said Mrs. Brown, earnestly, 'and I dared not excite her by insisting on taking it away. You, ma'am, who have a little girl of your own, will feel for me, I'm sure. But to-morrow. . .'

'Do not fear,' said Mrs. Leigh, and the tears were standing in her eyes, so touched was she by the story; 'your little girl shall keep the bird to-night, and to-morrow too, and for as many days as she likes. It would indeed be a bad return on our part, if we repaid all the care you have taken of Dicky by snatching him away from poor little Nancy before she had got quite well.'

'God bless you, ma'am,' said Mrs. Brown, warmly; 'God bless you, and reward you for your kindness. But Nancy will be well enough in a day or two, I hope, to understand that Dicky must go to his owners, for she's a good little girl, ma'am, though I say it that shouldn't, only illness has upset her like, for the time.'

'We must feed her up, and she'll soon get strong. And that reminds me,' said Mrs. Leigh, smiling, 'that I have not yet given the "five shillings reward" that the Folkestone people must be so tired

of hearing promised to the finder of the little canary.'

She put her hand in her purse, and handed Mrs. Brown half a sovereign.

'I have no change ma'am,' said the poor woman.

'I do not want any,' smiled Mrs. Leigh. 'Five shillings reward for finding him, and five shillings for all the expense Dicky has been to you these ten days.'

'Bless his heart,' exclaimed Mrs. Brown, 'it isn't much *he's* cost me.'

'Groundsel without end,' said Mrs. Leigh, counting, as she spoke, each article on her fingers, 'a little sand, a little seed, a great deal of care, and houseroom, besides the love he has met with. But we can't pay for that, Mrs. Brown, can we?'

She did not wait for an answer, but she rang the bell, saying :

'I am going to send Nancy a little soup, and some jelly. It will be too late for you to make beef-tea by the time you get home, and to-morrow morning I will come and see her, and bring Dicky a lot of sand and seed, for he really must not be an expense to you any longer.'

'God bless you, ma'am,' said Mrs. Brown again ; 'you are the kindest lady I ever met.'

The footman answered the bell, the orders were given, and very soon Mrs. Brown was laden with soup, jelly, and all sorts of good things for Nancy.

'I can never thank you as I ought, ma'am,' she said, as she rose to depart.

'It is I who ought to thank you, I think,' said Mrs. Leigh. '*I* have only paid a debt that I owed, but *you* have left your sick child, and come all this way in the wet, that I should not be another night in ignorance of the bird's safety, and I do thank you very much indeed.'

So saying, she rose and opened the door. Mrs. Brown, with a heart too full to speak, passed out of the room, curtsying low, and Mrs. Leigh took her way to the nursery.

As she went upstairs, with her mind full of the story she had just been hearing from Mrs. Brown, something rushed down from the landing above, and threw itself upon her.

Mrs. Leigh quite started, and nearly overbalanced herself.

'My dear child,' she exclaimed, when she saw who it was, 'how you frightened me!'

'At last!' exclaimed Edith. 'Oh! mamma, what a time you have been. Where is he? Where is he? Give him to me, quick. I expected to see him in your hand.'

'I've been hearing a very sad story, Edie,' said Mrs. Leigh, gently.

Her thoughts were dwelling on little Nancy, and her poor patient mother, and all the sufferings they had had to undergo. For the moment she had almost forgotten about Edith and the canary-bird, and hardly heard what the child was saying.

'Yes, mamma,' said Edith, impatiently; 'but what about Dicky?'

'He is safe and well,' answered Mrs. Leigh, 'but . . .'

'Yes, but where is he?' repeated Edith. 'Did the woman bring him? What has she done with him? Please tell me quick!'

And Edith fidgeted from one foot to the other with impatience as she spoke.

Mrs. Leigh looked at her for a moment without answering.

I fancy she was thinking how very selfish children can be sometimes, and how much taken up with their own concerns and pleasures; how apt to think what affects them is so very much more important than what affects other people, for she looked grave, even sad.

And I fancy also that many a mother must think this, when her mind is full of things her children know nothing about, sad thoughts perhaps, and troubles the children cannot share, and her little boys or girls go on begging her to read to them, or play with them, or tell them a story.

I dare say each of you can remember seeing your mamma look grave, and as if she were thinking of something else, when you have gone to her and asked her to do something for your amusement, and I hope, if you are a kind and unselfish little boy or girl, you have always, at such times, left off bothering her directly, and gone and occupied yourself your own way, saying to yourself, 'Mamma cannot attend to me now; she has got something else to think of.'

Well, Edith, I am sorry to say, though she noticed her mamma looked grave, did not leave off bothering; she thought nothing could be so important as her concerns.

‘Mamma!’ she said, ‘mamma! why don’t you answer? Why don’t you tell me? Why do you look so grave?’

‘I’m going to tell you the story, Edith,’ her mamma answered at last, ‘and then you will know why I look so grave.’

‘Oh, but tell me first about Dicky, mamma,’ said Edith.

‘He is safe and well, as I told you before,’ said Mrs. Leigh, ‘but you cannot have him to-night.’

‘Oh, mamma! mamma!’ exclaimed Edith, almost crying with disappointment; ‘why not?’

‘That is just what I am going to tell you,’ answered her mother. ‘Come into my room while I dress for dinner.’

Edith followed, but with such a pouting lip and such a discontented expression, that her mamma said very gravely:

‘A little while ago, you would have been too thankful only to hear Dicky was alive. What was it you said to me up in the nursery, only half-an-hour ago? Do you remember?’

Edith hung her head, and said something about having forgotten.

‘If *you* do not remember, *I* do,’ resumed Mrs. Leigh. “‘If I could only know,” you said, “that he was safe and happy, I think I could quite make

up my mind never to see him again. But it is so dreadful thinking of all the things that may have happened to him." Those are your own words, Edith. And yet *now*, when I tell you that he is safe and well, and that none of those dreadful things have happened to him, you look cross and grumble just because you cannot have him back to-night.'

'The cage is all ready and the sugar and all,' said Edith, beginning to cry.

'I see I must begin my story at once,' said Mrs. Leigh.

And she did so, and told Edith the sad story which you children know so well.

But to her great surprise, when she had finished, Edith's face still wore the same discontented expression.

'I want Dicky quite as much as Nancy,' she said, 'and it's *my* bird.'

Mrs. Leigh looked very grave at this. She got up, and put Edith off her lap.

'Very well,' she said, 'you shall have your bird back. Not to-night, but the first thing to-morrow. I thought, of course, after hearing about the poor little sick girl, you would immediately have said Nancy might keep it till she was quite well, particularly as, if it had not been for Mrs. Brown, Dicky would probably have died some time ago. But since it does not seem you have any intention of the kind, we will go to the cottage directly after breakfast to-morrow, and fetch away the bird. But, remember, on one condition.'

‘What is it, mamma?’ said Edith, uneasily.

‘That I will tell you to-morrow,’ answered Mrs. Leigh; ‘now run away to bed.’

She kissed her so gravely that Edith felt very uncomfortable.

‘Mamma,’ she said, trying to hide her face on her mamma’s shoulder, ‘you don’t kiss me so nicely as usual. You look so grave. Are you angry with me, mamma?’

‘I am not angry,’ Mrs. Leigh answered, ‘only disappointed to find I have such a selfish, hard-hearted little girl. However, we won’t talk about it any more to-night. There is the gong. I must go down.’

She disengaged herself from Edith, without kissing her again, and went down to dinner, and Edith went to the nursery thoroughly unhappy, and not feeling at all as you would expect a little girl to feel who had found her long-lost and much-loved canary-bird.

CHAPTER XI.

EDITH woke the next morning with a feeling that something very delightful had happened, and also something very disagreeable.

Very soon she remembered that Dicky was found, and directly after came the recollection of her mamma’s displeasure, and of her grave manner

when she said, 'We will fetch him back—but on one condition.'

'What *can* the condition be?' Edith said to herself over and over again while she was being dressed.

She knew very well what 'on condition' meant, for her mamma very often said such things as 'You may play in the sun on condition that you put on your shady hat;' or, 'You may go on the grass on condition that you change your boots directly you get home.' Once she had said to her almost the very same words as last night. 'You may sit up to late dinner to-night, but on one condition.'

And that condition had turned out to be that she was to go to bed half an hour earlier the next night.

So Edith knew that there would be something to be done that she would not particularly like before she got back her bird, but what it could be she could not imagine.

A message was sent up to the nursery that Miss Edith was to come down with her walking things on, as she was going out with her mamma directly after breakfast, and that Dicky's cage, and a parcel of sand, and another of seed, were to be brought down with her.

Edith was much excited by all these arrangements, and danced downstairs in great delight. But her pleasure was damped when she entered the dining-room and saw that her mamma was looking just as grave as she had done the evening before.

However, Mrs. Leigh said nothing, except to tell Edith to ask the footman to put all the parcels on the back seat of the fly which was waiting at the door.

Edith ran off to give the message, and when she returned found her mamma had gone up to put on her things. As soon as Mrs. Leigh reappeared, Edith went shyly up to her and whispered, 'Will you tell me the condition now, mamma?'

'I will tell you as we go along,' was the answer. 'Now jump into the fly.'

So Edith had to wait some time longer for her curiosity to be gratified.

As they drove along she tried to make herself feel happy by constantly saying, in a whisper: 'We are on our way to see Dicky: to fetch Dicky home.' But somehow or other, while her mamma looked so grave and did not talk, all the pleasure seemed to be taken out of it.

'Mamma,' she said at last, rather timidly, 'shan't you be very glad to see Dicky again?'

'Yes, dear,' said her mamma, 'very glad.'

'So shall I,' said Edith.

They drove on a good way farther, and then Edith began again.

'Mamma?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Will you tell me the condition now?'

'Yes, Edith, I will. The condition is that you yourself shall tell the little sick girl that you have come to take away the bird from her.'

'Oh, mamma,' said Edith, blushing crimson. 'Why?'

'Because *I* cannot. I would not do anything so unkind for the world. If it is to be done at all, you must do it yourself. Now jump out, for the fly will not be able to go any further than this, as the lane is so narrow.'

Edith's face was very long as she got out of the fly, and followed her mother slowly and gravely up the little path that led to Nancy's home.

Old Mrs. King was standing at the door.

'Can we see Mrs. Brown?' asked Mrs. Leigh of the old woman.

'She's up with the little girl, ma'am. Will you walk in while I go and tell her she's wanted?'

'Please don't call her away from the child,' said Mrs. Leigh; 'I'll go up. Come, Edith.'

She mounted the rickety little staircase, and Edith unwillingly followed. When they got to the top she turned round and held up her finger, for through the open door she could see Nancy lying in bed, and she fancied she might be asleep. She signed to Edith to come where she could see in, and whispered to her to be very quiet.

Fancy Edith's surprise when she recognised in the sick child the little girl with the sorrowful eyes that she had taken such a fancy to more than a fortnight ago, and for whom she had so often looked in vain in all the streets of Folkestone.

'Mamma!' she exclaimed, in an excited whisper, 'it's her! It's the little girl!'

'Hush,' said Mrs. Leigh, for Nancy was moving a little, and she was afraid Edith's talking might wake her. Edith put her hand in her mamma's and kept very still. Presently a weak little voice said, 'Mammy, are you there?'

Mrs. Brown advanced to the bedside, but her back was turned to the door, so she did not see Mrs. Leigh and Edith.

'Awake at last, dearie? why you *have* had a long sleep. It's getting on for ten o'clock; you'll be all the better for it, *I'm* sure.'

'Come here, mammy dear, I want to speak to you; I've got something I want to say.'

'What is it, my little Nannie?'

'I've been awake some time, mammy, but I've been thinking, and now I've quite made up my mind as to what I've been thinking about.'

'And what is it you've been thinking about, my dearie?'

'Mammy,' said the faint voice, and so faint it was that Mrs. Leigh and Edith could only just catch what it said; 'I was selfish and naughty last night, but I'm quite good to-day. You shall take Dicky back to his rich friends, and I won't say a word, or cry the very least, only I'd rather have him go soon, before I've time to think about it much.'

'Ah! that's my own good little Nancy,' said the joyful voice of Mrs. Brown. 'I knew you'd be willing to let him go to-day, and so I told the lady.'

'Lady, what lady, mammy?'

'You were asleep last night, dearie, and so you never knew that I left you and went to Bouverie Square to see the lady whom Dicky belongs to. It was she who sent you the nice beef-tea I gave you in the middle of the night, and which has made you sleep so well. I went to tell her Dicky was safe and well, for you know she's been searching for him this fortnight and more. She and her little girl, she told me, were getting afraid they would never see him again.'

'Little girl, mammy? Does Dicky belong to a little girl like me?'

'Just about your age, I should fancy, judging from the hat I saw lying on the sofa.'

'Oh, poor little girl!' exclaimed Nancy, 'how unhappy she must have been without him all this time. How naughty I was to keep him away from her last night. Oh, take him back to her, quick, dear mammy, and tell her how sorry I am.'

It was just at this moment that Mrs. Leigh turned round and looked at Edith. She did not say a word, and yet Edith's face flushed crimson, and the tears rushed into her eyes.

For that look seemed to say, 'You were not sorry for Nancy, but Nancy is sorry for *you*. *You*, when you heard *her* story, said "I want Dicky quite as much as Nancy does, and it's *my* bird." *She*, now she hears *your* story, says, "Oh, poor little girl . . . take him back to her quickly, and tell her how sorry I am." *You* only thought of yourself, *She* only thinks of you.'

Edith could have run away for shame, and hidden herself from the very sound of Nancy's feeble voice, but her hand was in her mamma's, and she was obliged to keep still.

'Bring Dicky to me, mammy; let me give him one more kiss before he goes.'

The sound of kissing followed, and then came Dicky's well-known 'sw-eet! sw-eet!'

Edith started as her little favourite's voice fell upon her ear; she raised her head for a minute, and looked and listened eagerly.

But it soon went down again, as she witnessed the sick child's sorrow, and heard her sad words of farewell.

'Good-bye, Dicky,' said poor little Nancy, and Edith knew she was crying, by the tone. 'I've loved you very much, and we've been very happy together, but you don't belong to me, Dicky, and so I must let you go.'

Then came a sound of sobbing; *outside* the door was a sound of sobbing too.

Mrs. Leigh felt the hand that was in hers suddenly and violently wrenched away. She turned to see what was the matter with Edith, and found her gone!

Edith was in the room, on the bed! with Nancy's thin hand in both of hers, and her tears flowing as fast.

'No! no!' she was saying, 'don't say good-bye to him; he shan't go away, I won't take him from you, You shall keep him as long as ever you like,

only please stop crying ; I can't bear to hear you cry.'

It all happened so quickly, and Mrs. Leigh was so taken by surprise, that Edith had finished speaking before her mother had sufficiently recovered her astonishment to follow her into the room.

When she got there, she found Edith wiping away Nancy's tears with her own pocket-handkerchief, and Mrs. Brown crying for joy by the bedside.

And Dicky ! You never saw a bird in such a state of delight as he was at the sight of his own little mistress, whom he knew again in a moment. He chirruped, he fluttered, he struggled to get at her.

But Edith was so occupied with Nancy that she actually had almost forgotten Dicky altogether, and I cannot tell you how pleased Mrs. Leigh was to see her little girl had so far overcome her selfishness as to be able thus entirely to forget herself while rejoicing in the happiness of others.

Dicky, however, grew so clamorous that Mrs. Leigh took pity on the little bird and opened his cage-door, to allow him to get to his little mistress. Out he flew, and perched upon her shoulder ; and Edith, with a cry of delight, turned round and covered him with kisses.

It was pretty to see the child's delight at meeting her little favourite, and the bird's delight at meeting her.

Nancy, with her pale face bright with pleasure, lay back on her pillow, and watched them with a smile.

There were so many little tricks of Dicky's that Nancy had had no idea of, and it pleased her to see Edith make him do them all. Very soon, Mrs. Brown was despatched to fetch all the parcels from the carriage, and Edith put Dicky into his own cage, and gave him sand and seed and a lump of sugar; and the two little girls became great friends over all this, and chatted together as if they had known each other all their lives. Edith reminded Nancy of the day when she had first seen her, and was delighted to find Nancy remembered it too.

In fact, she enjoyed the half-hour in the cottage so much, that she was quite unwilling to come away.

But Mrs. Leigh was afraid Nancy would be tired, so she would not let Edith stay any longer; but she promised her she should return to-morrow, and pay Dicky another visit.

'And every day, mamma,' entreated Edith; 'every day till Nancy is quite well.'

Mrs. Leigh readily gave permission, and Edith left the cottage with a far lighter heart than when she had entered it.

'I feel so happy, mamma,' she said, as she seated herself in the fly by her mother's side.

She slipped her hand into her mamma's as she spoke, and knew by its fond pressure that she was pleased with her, and that the cloud that had arisen between them had quite passed away.

'Well, Miss Edith,' said nurse and Margaret to-

gether, as she entered the nursery, 'and where's Dicky?'

'I have not brought him,' answered Edith, 'but I'm much happier than if I had. I've left him to Nancy, who wants him much more than me.'

That evening her mother spoke to her of the evil of selfishness, and pointed out to her how heedless it makes us of the happiness of others, and to what bad feelings it may lead.

'Why, it made my little girl almost cruel to-day,' she said.

But Edith was as penitent as her mother could possibly desire, and Mrs. Leigh saw it was not necessary to say much.

Edith had had a lesson that day which she would not easily forget, and one that her mother hoped would make a deep impression upon her.

In order, however, to see how far the effect would last, Mrs. Leigh determined in her own mind to leave entirely to Edith how long Nancy was to keep the canary.

Accordingly, she never said anything about it.

She took Edith to the cottage the next day, and the day after, and the day after that.

'Nancy is getting much better,' she said, on the fourth day; 'she will soon be quite well.'

'Yes,' said Edith. 'I'm so glad, mamma, ain't you?'

But she said nothing about the bird.

It went on like this for ten days or more, till at last Mrs. Leigh really began to think Edith in-

tended Dicky to remain with Nancy till they left Folkestone.

The fact was, Edith had grown very fond of Nancy. Her daily visit to the sick child had become a source of great interest to her.

She had taken to her, as you may remember, the very first day she had seen her looking mournfully at her with her 'sorrowful eyes:' and now that she had come to know her better, she was more than ever attracted to her. Nancy was so good, so gentle, and so patient that no one could know her without loving her.

Edith took pleasure in lending her her books, her pictures, and her toys, and was always planning something or other for Nancy's amusement.

The day was now rapidly approaching when Edith was to leave Folkestone and to return to Homeleigh, and her joy at the prospect of returning to all her pets and pastimes was very much damped by the thought that she would have to say good-bye to Nancy for ever. There was something else, too, which she was turning over in her mind, which made her feel very sad, so that, altogether, she often looked grave and thoughtful as the time wore on.

Her mamma of course observed this, and at last, one evening, she spoke to her about it, and asked her what was the matter.

Edith answered that the prospect of leaving Nancy made her sorrowful, for one thing, she added, half to herself.

‘And you can’t tell me the other thing?’ said her mamma.

‘Yes, mamma,’ said Edith, ‘I’ll try, only I’m so afraid I shall cry when I tell you. It is that I know Nancy will be so lonely without Dicky, and so——’

Her lips quivered, and the tears came into her eyes.

‘So what, darling?’ said her mother, gently.

‘So I’ve been trying all these days to make up my mind to do something, mamma,’ said Edith, raising her eyes, streaming with tears, to her mother’s face, ‘and it’s only to-day that I’ve quite, quite made up my mind to do it.’

‘What is it, my darling?’

‘To give Dicky to Nancy altogether,’ said Edith, bursting into tears, and hiding her face on her mother’s shoulder. ‘I can’t help crying about it, mamma, but I’ve quite made up my mind to do it, all the same.’

‘My dear little girl,’ said her mamma, taking her into her lap, and kissing her, ‘I cannot tell you how pleased I am that you should, of your own accord, propose to do so kind an action; but it is not necessary, darling, for you to make such a self-sacrifice. For some time past, Mrs. Brown and I have been concocting a little plan together by means of which neither you, nor Nancy, nor Dicky need be separated from one another at all. I have never said anything to you about it, because I was not sure till to-day whether it could be

managed or not ; but now it is all quite settled, and nothing remains to be done but for me to tell you what it is.'

'Oh, mamma!' exclaimed Edith, 'what can it be?'

Mrs. Leigh then told her that there was a small cottage at Homeleigh which was at that moment vacant, and that she had proposed to Mrs. Browne to leave Folkestone, and to come and settle in that cottage.

There was a little garden attached to it, and the idea was that Mrs. Brown should grow vegetables, and keep cocks and hens, and make her money by selling them at the market.

Mrs. Brown had joyfully consented, feeling sure she could earn her livelihood far better so, than trudging about with her barrow in Folkestone.

Nancy was to go to the village school, and when she grew older, to go out to service, or perhaps, who knows, become one of the servants at Homeleigh.

'And Dicky,' finished Mrs. Leigh, with a smile, 'can either live with Nancy, and you can go to her to see him, or else he can live at Homeleigh, and Nancy can come to see you.'

I need not tell you of Edith's joy, nor of that of Nancy, who had not been told of the arrangement, on purpose that Edith might have the pleasure of announcing it to her.

All I need tell you is that no one said a word against the plan ; and so it came to pass, that when

Mr. and Mrs. Leigh and Edith left Folkestone and returned to Homeleigh, Nancy and her mother went too!

All this happened several years ago. Edith is now a tall young lady in the schoolroom, who takes her walks with her governess, and learns a great many lessons.

Nancy is a tall girl too, and has left the village school, and is learning dressmaking, to fit herself for being Edith's maid.

Dicky is getting very old and lazy, and his voice is cracked, and he sits huddled up on his perch most of the day.

You would hardly know any of the people in the story again: those few years have changed them so much.

The town-crier is the one who has altered least.

He walks up and down the town still, and his voice is as strong as ever.

Any day that you go to Folkestone you may see him with his bell in his hand and a crowd of boys round him. And any day you may chance to hear him cry:

‘Lost!
On the Beach,
A Geneva Watch
and CHAIN!
Whoever will bring it
To — Bouverie Square,
Will receive
One Pound Reward!!!
God save the Queen!’

But if you ask him about Edith and Nancy and the canary, I am afraid he will shake his head and say he knows nothing about them.

For they are imaginary people, and Dicky is an imaginary bird, and the only real person in the story is

THE TOWN-CRIER.

THE
CHILDREN WITH THE INDIAN-RUBBER BALL:
OR,
A LESSON OF OBEDIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was on a lovely evening towards the end of August that some children were playing together in one of the squares at Brighton. The square was very full, and there were many other groups of children scattered about in different parts; some playing at croquet, others at 'Tom Tiddler's ground,' and others at the popular square-game, 'Flags.' But the group first mentioned had a big indian-rubber ball which they were throwing from one to the other. It was a very large ball indeed, almost as much as the youngest of them, a little boy of five, could hold. His brother and sister, who looked about seven and nine years old respectively, were very kind to the little fellow, and often pretended to let it slip out of their hands that he might have a chance of catching it sometimes. Their governess was sitting under a tree reading, for the children played so happily together that she could enjoy her book without interruption.

This was not the case all over the square, I am sorry to say. Among some of the groups a quarrel arose every now and then; and an appeal to a

mother, or nurse, or governess, had to be made before the game could be resumed.

From the croquet-players came such expressions as: 'That's not fair! you pushed.' 'It's not through the hoop!' 'Yes, it is.' 'You needn't have sent me *quite* so far!' etc., etc. And from the other game, such shouts as: 'I touched you, and you pulled your frock out of my hand!' or, 'You're caught!' or, 'You're not released, because you weren't standing in the right place; it's not fair!'

But the group of fair-haired children never quarrelled, though they laughed and shouted quite as much as the rest. In the middle of their game, the square-gate nearest to them opened, and a lady and gentleman and two little girls came in. They did not seem to know any of the people in the square, for they stood watching the games for a few minutes, and then walked along the gravel path. The youngest walked between her father and mother, talking quietly to them; but the eldest fell back, and cast a longing glance at all the happy groups playing about on the grass. She was particularly attracted by the three fair-haired children with the indian-rubber ball, and stood watching them with eager eyes as they kicked it about and made it bound in the air. She was about eight years old, and had bright eyes and dark hair. Restless eyes they were—eyes that took in everything at a glance, and were all over the square in a moment. She stood still for a few minutes, and then ran after her father and mother.

‘Mamma,’ she called out, ‘please stop a moment, I want to speak to you.’

Mr. and Mrs. Fielding turned round, and waited until she came up.

‘Mamma,’ she said, eagerly, ‘*may* I ask those little children to let me play with them?’

‘My dear child,’ answered her mother, ‘you know very well that I never let you play with children that I do not know.’

‘But, mamma,’ persisted Alice, ‘they are such very nice little children; and I am sure you would like to know them.’

‘I have no doubt, dear,’ said Mrs. Fielding, ‘that they are very nice children; but then, you see, I do not know who they are.’

‘But I will ask them, if you like,’ said Alice, eagerly. ‘I don’t the least mind asking them their names.’

‘I dare say not,’ said her father, laughing; ‘but I think they would consider you a very rude little girl. And what would their governess say, I wonder, to a strange child running up to them and saying, “What’s your name?” No—no, Alice, I could not think of letting you do such a thing. Come along, and walk with us.’

‘It is so dull, walking along the path,’ grumbled Alice, ‘and that is the *jolliest* game of all.’

‘Constance does not find it dull,’ said Mr. Fielding; ‘she is quite happy walking with us—are you not, Constance?’ and, taking his youngest daughter’s hand as he spoke, they all walked on.

'It *is* rather dull for them without any companions,' said Mrs. Fielding to her husband, 'and rather hard to see all these games going on, without joining in them ; but I suppose the Conynghams will call in a day or two.'

'Yes, I should think so,' he answered ; 'and their children must be about the age of ours.'

'What did you say, mamma?' asked Constance, 'what children?'

'Your Aunt Mary has some friends here,' answered Mrs. Fielding ; 'and she said she would write and tell them we were coming. So I dare say you will have some companions soon.'

Alice had remained behind, and had not heard this conversation, but on Constance turning round and saying her mamma had got something to tell her, she came running up.

'I was saying you would have some playfellows soon,' said Mrs. Fielding ; and she repeated what she had just told Constance about the little Conynghams.

But Alice was in a discontented frame of mind, and she would not see any comfort in the prospect. She was quite sure she should not like the little Conynghams ; she would rather not know them. She only wanted to know the fair-haired children, and if she might not play with them, she should rather play by herself.

'Very well,' said her mother, 'you needn't play with the poor little Conynghams unless you like ; but I think you are in a great hurry to say you will

not like them. You had better wait until you know them.'

But Alice was quite sure she should never care for them. They would be covered with freckles, she knew, and have dark hair, and, in fact, be as unlike the fair-haired children as possible.

'Papa,' she entreated, 'do just come and see them playing; I am sure you will like them. And won't you come, mamma?'

Mrs. Fielding was tired, so she sat down on a seat with Constance, and Alice and her father walked off together.

The indian-rubber ball game was still going on, and Mr. Fielding acknowledged that it was a very merry game, and that they were very dear little children; but still he was not, as Alice had secretly hoped, so much overcome by their appearance as to give her leave to play with them.

She kept him there as long as she could, hoping to the last he would suddenly relent; but after awhile he said it was time to be going, and very unwillingly Alice was carried off to join her mother and sister.

They met them coming along the path, and Mrs. Fielding said they must be going home. Her husband unlocked the square-gate, and held it open for them to pass through. Alice was the last to go out, and even then was looking longingly back to the children by whom she had been so much attracted.

Their house was nearly opposite the gate, and

they had only just to walk across the road and open the door, for doors are seldom kept locked at Brighton.

On the hall-table were some cards and a note, and Mrs. Fielding read out loud the names Mr. and Mrs. Conyngham.

'There, children,' she said, 'you have not had to wait long,' and she added, as she opened and read the note, 'Mrs. Conyngham asks me to bring one of my little girls to-morrow to make acquaintance with her children.'

'Only one,' said Constance with a little sigh—she knew the rule of 'eldest first'—'then I suppose it will be Alice.'

'Well, it would naturally be Alice, of course, but as she seems to have taken such a violent dislike to the little Conynghams, I suppose she will not care to go—eh, Alice?'

Alice did not answer; she was looking at the cards.

'I'm sure she's not a nice person,' she said; 'her cards are not thick, like mamma's; they are horrid thin things, like paper; and if she's not nice, I'm sure her children won't be nice.'

'I don't think that follows, Alice,' said her father; 'at least, I know little girls with nice mammas, who are anything but nice themselves sometimes.'

Alice felt rather shy, for she guessed what her papa meant, and she went to the hall-window, for she knew she was going to blush.

Just as she got there, she heard merry voices, and

the fair-haired children passed along the pavement on their way home. The eldest boy was carrying the camp-stool for his governess, the little girl was carrying the book, and the small boy was weighed down by the indian-rubber ball. They were talking and laughing with their governess in French, and making plans for next day. Alice heard them say they would be able to build sand castles in the morning, because the tide would be so far out.

How delicious it sounded! and, oh! if only she could go and build sand castles with them.

She remained gazing out of the window long after they had gone by.

'Well, Alice,' said her mother, 'I am waiting to know if you want to go with me to-morrow.'

'No, thank you, mamma,' said Alice, turning round and speaking very decidedly; 'I am more than ever sure that I shall never care to know the little Conynghams.'

CHAPTER II.

IT was a lovely bright morning next day, and the little Fieldings went down to the beach directly after breakfast. Their mamma bought them some spades on the way, as is the usual custom the first morning at the sea-side.

The first thing that Alice's eyes fell upon were

the three fair-haired children, playing all together as before. They had tied a string round the same indian-rubber ball, and were throwing it out as far as they could in the sea. Then they held the string tight, while the waves washed the ball gradually up on the shore. At a little distance the string could not be seen, and Alice thought at first they were throwing the ball recklessly in the water, and could not imagine how it always came safely back.

‘What delicious games they do have!’ she sighed.

‘Who, dear?’ asked Mrs. Fielding.

‘Why, the same little boys and girl that I want to know *so* much,’ returned Alice, despondently.

‘Come and play, Ally,’ said Constance; ‘we’ll have a very nice game.’

Alice was not much inclined to at first, but the new spade and beach-basket tempted her at last, and she joined her sister in digging holes in the shingle, and filling the beach-baskets with the prettiest little stones that they could find.

The tide was going gradually out, and the sand beginning to appear. As soon as it was dry enough to stand on, the fair-haired children left off their game, and began to build a castle on the sand.

At this sight Alice got disgusted with her own game, and her longing eyes watched every movement of the children with the keenest interest. Constance tried to recall her attention in vain. Alice imperceptibly began to move away from her sister, and to get nearer to the other children.

Constance was rather disconsolate at being left

to play alone; but after calling to her sister once or twice, and seeing it was of no use, she gave it up and went on digging by herself.

By-and-by, Mr. Fielding came down on the beach, and carried his wife off for a little walk on the Esplanade.

‘The children will be quite safe here,’ he said, ‘and we shall see them from the top of the cliff.’

Constance felt a little forlorn when they were out of sight, and looked anxiously after Alice. She was a good way off now, for she was standing between the sea and the place where the children were building their castle. She was getting closer and closer to them, and Constance thought she must be talking to them, she seemed so very near. But she went on with her game at last, for she saw it was no use waiting for her sister, and she began making a sand roley-poley pudding, and sticking little stones in it to look like currants. She was rather pleased with it when it was finished, it looked so like a real pudding, and she cut quite thin slices off it with her spade. She could see her papa and mamma sitting on a seat on the Esplanade, so she felt quite happy, particularly when they kissed their hands and nodded to her.

All of a sudden, somebody rushed past her and plunged down on the shingle. Constance was much startled, for the person, whoever it was, brushed so roughly up against her, that she was almost knocked over. She turned round, and saw to her astonishment that it was Alice! Alice, with a very

red face, and rather sparkling eyes, sitting on the beach, throwing the pebbles about, and looking very much put out.

‘Oh, Ally! how you made me jump!’ she exclaimed, running up to her sister. ‘Why, what is the matter?’

But Alice would not tell her, and seemed very excited.

‘What’s become of mamma?’ she asked.

‘She’s up there,’ said Constance, pointing to the Esplanade.

‘Up where?’ exclaimed Alice, jumping up from her seat; ‘show me, quick, Constance!’

Constance pointed to the seat on the Esplanade, where Mr. and Mrs. Fielding were still sitting, and repeated, ‘Up there, with papa.’

Alice got very red, and looked rather frightened.

‘Why do you blush so?’ inquired Constance.

Alice would not say at first, but Constance begged her so hard to tell her, that she yielded at last, and confessed what had happened.

It seemed that when she first went towards the fair-haired children, she had only meant to watch their game for a minute, and then return to her sister; but the nearer she got, the more delicious did the game appear. They had made a lovely castle of sand, with pebbles all round the tops of the walls; and just as she came up they were making little holes for guns. There was a little moat all round for water, and every wave that broke on the shore helped to fill it. They were settling

together that they would put the indian-rubber ball on the top for a sort of dome, and the youngest boy ran off to the beach, where his governess was sitting, to fetch it.

It was just then that Alice thought she would go and stand on the other side, to see how the castle would look from the sea. When she got there, she perceived for the first time that Constance was playing alone on the sand in the distance, and that her mamma was nowhere to be seen.

The temptation to join the children's game had been very strong before, and now it became stronger than ever.

Alice was not naturally disobedient, and at first she violently repelled the thought, but when they stuck the ball on the top of the castle, with a flag on a stick in the little hole, and all shouted, 'Hurrah!' she could not help saying 'Hurrah,' too; it did look so very jolly. 'Now we must storm the castle!' said the eldest boy, and they began throwing stones against the sand walls.

This was too much; Alice could stand it no longer, and she ran up to the children and said, 'Oh! *may* I help you to knock it down?'

The little girl looked rather surprised, and then, drawing herself up, she said very civilly, but very decidedly, 'We are not allowed to play with anybody mamma does not know.'

The words were hardly out of her mouth before Alice turned round and ran back to Constance as hard as she could, her cheeks burning, and some-

thing very like tears glistening in her eyes. Never in all her life had she felt so disgraced. She fancied, as she ran, that she heard the children laughing at her, and, hurried as she was, she could not help turning round to see if they were looking after her; but they were only storming the castle and laughing over their game.

When she came up to Constance, playing so quietly and happily with her roley-poley pudding, she wished heartily she had never left her—for what good had she done? She had lost all her fun with her sister—for it was nearly time to go home; she had been refused by the fair-haired children; and, worse than all, she had disobeyed her mother and father, and they would probably be very much displeased with her.

It was a sad business, certainly, and Constance did not know what to say to comfort Alice, when she had finished her story.

The little girls were still talking it over when they heard their father calling them from the steps to come home. Constance ran towards him, and Alice followed slowly, feeling very much ashamed of herself.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Fielding, ‘and how have you enjoyed your morning?’

Alice did not answer, for she didn’t know what to say; but Constance was full of all the fun she had had on the sand.

‘But how came you to leave poor Constance all alone, Alice?’ asked her mother.

Alice hung her head, and got very red indeed.

'I've got something to tell you, mamma,' she said, in a very low voice.

'Would you rather wait till we get home?' asked Mrs. Fielding, for she saw how very shaky Alice was, and she was rather afraid of a scene on the Esplanade.

'Oh no,' said Alice, 'I can't wait; I'd much rather tell you at once. Mamma, I've been very disobedient, and I've done what you told me not, for I went and asked those little children to let me play with them;' and Alice looked up anxiously in her mother's face to see if she was very angry.

But Mrs. Fielding only answered very quietly, 'I am glad you are honest about it, Alice, for it would have been no use trying to hide it, as I was watching you the whole time.'

'And were you very angry, mamma?' faltered Alice.

'I was more surprised than angry,' answered her mother. 'I did not think you would have so flatly disobeyed me. Your father could hardly believe his eyes when he saw you go up to the little girl.'

Alice's eyes filled with tears, but before she had time to answer, her mother went on: 'But what did the little girl say, Alice; and what made you run away so quickly?'

Alice's face worked with several conflicting feelings, and the answer was so low that her mother could hardly catch it.

Mrs. Fielding did not say anything more. She

knew what a proud child Alice was, and felt that her wounded vanity was punishment enough.

Alice felt very much humbled and very penitent, and they walked home in silence.

CHAPTER III.

‘WELL,’ said Mr. Fielding, at luncheon, ‘who is to come with us to see the little Conynghams?’

‘Constance,’ answered his wife. ‘Alice has made up her mind she does not want to know them.’

Alice felt very sorry, when she saw them all start, that she had been so hasty in settling she would not go; for it was very dull to be left all alone; and she stood watching them from the window, feeling rather forlorn. She did not exactly know what to do with herself while they were away, and the time seemed very long indeed. It must have been nearly an hour and a half before she heard the hall-door open, and her father’s and mother’s voices. She ran down to meet them.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Fielding, ‘and what have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon?’

‘I’ve been very dull indeed,’ answered Alice. ‘I’m so glad you’ve come home. But where’s Constance?’

‘She is going to stay to tea with the little Conynghams,’ answered her mother. ‘I don’t think she will be back till bed-time.’

‘Oh dear, what a bother!’ said Alice; ‘I shall have no one to play with all day.’

‘And I’m afraid no one to walk with either,’ answered her mother; ‘for your father and I are going to drive with Mrs. Conyngham. However,’ she added, ‘it is quite your own doing; for you could have gone to the little Conynghams’ if you had liked.’

Alice was silent, but she looked very grave.

‘Are the little Conynghams nice?’ she asked, presently.

‘Yes; they seemed charming children, as far as I could judge from just seeing them for a few minutes in the drawing-room; but Constance will be able to tell you all about them when she comes home.’

‘Have they got dark hair?’ asked Alice, ‘and how many of them are there? and how old are they? and are they boys or girls?’

‘Upon my word, Alice,’ said her father, ‘you seem very inquisitive about the little Conynghams, considering you do not wish to know them, and are quite sure you will never like them. However, if you really are anxious to know, you have only got to look out of the window presently, for I heard them arranging with Constance that they would all go into the square.’

Then Mrs. Fielding went up to her room to dress for her drive, and Alice followed her.

It certainly was very funny, considering, as Mr. Fielding had said, how very little Alice had cared

to make acquaintance with the little Conynghams, that she should be so anxious to see them, and should pop up and down to the window as many times as she did, while her mother was getting ready, to see if they had arrived in the square.

Presently she heard a carriage stop at the door, and in a few minutes a message was sent up that Mrs. Conyngham had called for Mrs. Fielding.

‘Good-bye, Alice, dear,’ said her mother. ‘I am afraid you will be very dull by yourself ; but remember, it is your own fault.’

Alice felt half inclined to ask to be allowed to join the Conynghams and Constance in the square, but could not summon up courage ; so she kissed her mamma without speaking, and remained standing by the dressing-table after she was gone, feeling very dull and deserted.

Presently a merry laugh in the square attracted her attention, and she ran to the window. There, first thing, were the fair-haired children playing with the indian-rubber ball, and with an impatient stamp of her foot Alice turned away. She was quite glad now she had not asked her mamma to let her join the little Conynghams. She was quite sure she should have enjoyed no other play while that delicious ball game was going on right under her eyes, nor cared for any companions but the pretty fair-haired children. Besides, she felt rather shy of the little girl now, and had an uncomfortable recollection of the way she had drawn herself up, and said, ‘We are not allowed to play with any

one our mamma does not know.' Still, she liked watching them very much, and soon moved to the window again.

Yes, there they were, standing in a sort of ring, throwing the ball from one to the other as fast as possible.

How charming it looked ! But stop—there are *four* of them to-day, or is it a friend they have got with them ? There are four figures in the ring, and the fourth figure is a new one—a little girl.

How is it that the figure is so familiar to Alice ? Why does she seem to know so well the long brown hair, and the hat, and the coat, and everything ?

Can it be—*is* it—it *is* Constance, her own sister Constance, playing with the fair-haired children, and seeming as friendly as possible.

'Oh ! how naughty of Constance !' exclaimed Alice ; 'she has asked them to let her play with them. How could she ?' and, forgetting her own recent disobedience in her indignation at her sister's, Alice ran out of the room with a scarlet face, and dashed downstairs two steps at a time. 'Mamma—mamma !' she cried, as she caught sight of her mother in the hall just going towards the carriage at the door ; 'stop a minute. I want to speak to you. Please come upstairs for a minute.'

'All the way up again ?' said Mrs. Fielding, smiling ; but she made no objection, and followed Alice into the room she had lately quitted.

Breathlessly, Alice dragged her to the window, and pointed to the group in the square.

‘Just look! mamma,’ she said.

But instead of the look of astonishment and displeasure which Alice expected to see on her mother’s face, she saw no change from its usual placid expression, and Mrs. Fielding, after looking all over the square, turned to her, and said :

‘I don’t see anything particular, Alice.’

‘Why, mamma! just look at Constance! did you ever know *anything* so disobedient——’

‘Except yourself this morning,’ finished Mrs. Fielding; ‘is that what you were going to say?’

Alice hung her head and blushed.

‘I forgot,’ she said.

‘But you are mistaken,’ continued her mother; ‘Constance is not disobeying me. I only forbid your playing with children I do not know, and I know those little boys and that little girl quite well.’

‘What, mamma!’ exclaimed Alice; ‘*you* know them?—you know those children with the indian-rubber ball?’

‘Yes, Alice,’ said her mother, laying both her hands on her little daughter’s shoulders, and looking into her face with a smile, ‘I do. Those “children with the indian-rubber ball,” as you call them, are the little Conynghams.’

CHAPTER IV.

I THINK it would have made anybody laugh to see Alice's face at that moment !

Such a curious mixture of feeling was depicted on it.

Uncertainty, perplexity, pleasure, dismay, and blank astonishment by turns expressed themselves in rapid succession.

Then she began to pour forth a string of questions ; but before Mrs. Fielding was able to satisfy one inquiry, her husband's voice was heard on the stairs, asking whether she knew that she was keeping Mrs. Conyngham waiting all this time ; and so she was obliged to hurry off.

She had time, however, to kiss Alice, and to give her leave to join the others in the square.

I think she felt sorry for her, standing there with her blushing face and downcast eyes, and felt that she had been punished enough by losing the luncheon and fun with her beloved fair-haired children, without being condemned to a solitary afternoon in the house on such a beautiful day.

But faults are their own punishment, and we cannot do wrong without suffering for it ; so, though Alice's mother was so kind and forgiving, Alice was not to go unpunished, as we shall see.

She went to the window to see the carriage drive off, and she blushed more than ever when she saw how her father and mother and Mrs. Conyngham

were talking and laughing in the carriage ; for she fancied they must be talking about her.

‘It was very disagreeable to be laughed at,’ she reflected, as she stood rather sulkily at the window, gazing at the retreating carriage, ‘and it was altogether very tiresome, and she wished none of it had ever happened.’

As the carriage rounded the square, it passed near where the children were playing, and Alice saw the little boys wave their hats, and the little girl and Constance kiss their hands to it as it drove by.

On seeing this, Alice’s spirits suddenly rose.

Every disagreeable feeling connected with the affair was instantly swallowed up in the one delightful thought that the eagerly desired privilege was hers at last, and that she was free to go and play with those delightful children now! at once! this instant! and for as long as ever she chose.

She jumped about the room like a mad thing, and then flew upstairs to put on her things.

She was just ready, when her mother’s maid came into the room.

‘Where are you going, Miss Alice?’ said she.

‘Oh! don’t stop me!’ exclaimed Alice, fearing she was going to be told she must have her hair done again, or must put on another pair of boots ; ‘I am in a great hurry, and I’m going into the square.’

‘Going into the square like that, Miss! Why,

you have got on your beach-boots and your brown holland frock, that you were messing in on the sand all the morning.'

'Oh! never mind,' said Alice, almost dancing with impatience; 'it doesn't matter a bit, and I'm so late.'

'I'm sure, Miss Alice, your mamma wouldn't let you go out like that, if she were at home. You had better come and change your frock.'

'Oh! Miller,' said Alice, almost crying, 'it would take me an hour: I can't wait, really.'

Miller began to get angry.

'You ought not to go like that, miss, I'm sure. Why, Miss Constance has got on her Indian silk suit, and her best hat with the blue feather.'

But before she had come to the end of her sentence, Alice was scampering downstairs.

'I'm sure mamma won't mind,' she said to herself as she ran. 'It's only Miller.'

But she felt a little uncomfortable all the time, and very much wished Miller had not happened to come into the room at that particular moment.

'Everything is so unfortunate to-day,' she muttered. 'It's the most disagreeable day I ever spent, that it is.'

And by the time she reached the hall-door, she was quite tearful at the thought of what an unfortunate creature she was, and how everything went wrong with her.

When children are in a bad frame of mind themselves, they are so apt to think everybody and

everything is wrong ; and they fail to see that the fault lies in themselves.

She crossed the road, and opened the square-gate.

Then she looked all round for her sister and the children.

She got quite cheery again, at the thought of the pleasure in store for her ; she tried to remember how she had felt the day before, watching the children at play, and feeling she must not join them.

‘It’s not such a very disagreeable day, after all,’ she said to herself. ‘It’s much nicer than yesterday.’

She caught sight of the group in the distance, and stood still for a moment, that she might enjoy the feeling to the full of being able to do what she had so ardently wished.

As a cat plays with a mouse before devouring it, did Alice toy with her pleasure, feeling it was hers whenever she chose to take advantage of it.

Then she set off running with all her might.

But before she had got half-way across the grass, she saw Constance and the governess, with the little boy, walk away to the other end of the square, and go out at the gate which faced the sea, leaving the eldest boy and girl alone.

Alice stopped short in her run, to wonder what could be the reason of this. She hoped very much that Constance would soon be back, for she felt a little shy of going up to the little girl after the

repulse of the morning, if her sister were not there.

The nearer she got to the children, the shyer she felt.

The little girl looked so exactly the same as she had when she had drawn herself up, and said, 'We are not allowed to play with anyone mamma does not know,' that it brought back to Alice her feelings of the morning very disagreeably, and she felt half inclined to turn back.

But she felt so sure that the little Conynghams would guess that she was Constance's sister, and come to meet her in a minute, that she persevered.

She was now so close that she could hear every word they said ; but neither boy nor girl took the slightest notice of her, and went on talking together just as if she were not there.

'I hope Constance will soon be back,' she heard the little girl say. 'Which shop have they gone to?'

'Oh! it's a good way down the Esplanade,' answered the boy. 'They can't be back for ten minutes or a quarter-of-an-hour.'

Alice began to think they could not have seen her, and gave two or three little coughs to attract their attention.

She succeeded at last, for the little girl turned round and looked up. But though she looked Alice full in the face, she did not smile, or come forward, or show the slightest sign of recognition.

Alice, standing there, with her face all smiles,

and her hand almost outstretched, expecting every moment to be recognised as Constance's sister, felt so abashed that she got hot and uncomfortable all over.

'I say, Edred,' she heard his sister say in a low voice, 'what a funny little girl that is ; she is always staring at us.'

'It's the same little girl that wanted to play with us this morning, isn't it?' Edred answered. 'I wonder why she stares so ; it's very rude of her.'

'It's rather a bore,' said his sister ; 'let's move away a little.' And they both walked off.

Poor Alice ! Fancy her feelings on hearing this ! She wished she could hide herself away somewhere, and never, never see the little Conyng-hams again !

She felt more disgraced than ever, and heartily wished she had never come in the square, never been on the beach, never come to Brighton !

Blushing all over, and with tears of wounded pride springing to her eyes, she rushed off, and went and hid herself in a little summer-house at the other end of the square.

'What was she to do next?' she asked herself.

She longed to go home and shut herself up in her mother's bedroom, and wait there till she came home to console and advise her.

But she was positively ashamed to cross the grass to the gate, for fear of meeting the little Conyng-hams.

Her one wish now was to escape from the very children she had so longed to be with only yesterday.

How her feelings had changed in one short day !
And that it was all her own fault, did not make it any the pleasanter to think of.

She told herself, now, that if only she had been obedient and contented, like Constance, none of it would have happened.

'Oh dear ! oh dear !' she sighed, 'why did I ever go and ask them to let me play ?' Why, indeed ! Alice was now, as we said she would, finding out that wrongdoing is its own punishment.

What a humiliating position she was now in : shut up in a stuffy little summer-house, not even daring to run across the square and go home.

After a time, she got so tired of her imprisonment that she crept to the door of the summer-house and peeped out to see what they were all doing, and what chance there was of her escaping unobserved.

Constance had come back now, and they were all standing in a group, talking.

But not even the sight of her sister made Alice wish to join the children ; she felt too humiliated, too disgraced. It would be impossible to proclaim herself the 'rude little girl who stares so,' even though Constance should, at the same time, introduce her as her sister.

No ! her only wish now was to pass without being seen, and to get safely home again. As she stood there, watching her opportunity, something in Constance's attire seemed to strike her.

She took off her own hat and looked at it with

a puzzled expression, and then looked at her sister's.

Her own was black straw, with a pheasant's feather.

Constance's was white straw, with a light blue feather.

She looked down at herself, and saw a brown holland suit trimmed with dark blue braid. She glanced at her sister again, and saw an Indian silk suit, with a light blue sash.

'Why! good gracious,' she exclaimed, 'we are not dressed alike! I quite forgot that. No wonder they didn't guess we were sisters.'

A flush of shame dyed her cheeks as she thought of Miller.

'Oh dear! I wish I'd changed it when she told me. Why didn't I? If I only had, of course they would have known who I was directly.'

Poor Alice! the fruits of disobedience were visiting her pretty sharply, and yet she had no one to blame but herself.

But while she stood there lamenting, she suddenly saw a movement among the children she was watching; and to her horror, the group turned towards her and made straight for the summer-house, running with all their might.

She was at her wits' end! She felt regularly caught in a trap.

If she ran out she must meet them; if she remained where she was she must inevitably be discovered.

What was to be done?

She stooped down and looked under the seat, to see if there was room to squeeze in there and hide herself.

But it did not look inviting. It was dirty and dusty, and swarming with insects, and she could not make up her mind to take a seat among them.

And yet something must be done, and done quickly too, for she could hear the steps and voices getting nearer and nearer every moment.

She looked all round her like a startled deer who feels that the hounds are gaining upon him, and that not a moment must be lost.

The summer-house was very much out of repair, and at one corner there was a place where the twigs and branches of which it was composed had given way, leaving a little gap.

Quick as lightning Alice dashed towards it, and forced herself through, tearing her frock as she did so, and scratching her hands and face; but she felt nothing, cared for nothing, so anxious was she to get away in time.

She had only just managed to squeeze herself through and to look about her, when she found that there was no way of getting back again, except by running round in front of the summer-house, or by returning the way she had come, for a hedge ran all round the arbour, and there was only a very narrow little path between it and the hedge.

So here she was, once more in a trap.

She carefully drew her frock tight round her, lest a little bit should show through the gap, and stooping down, made herself as small as possible.

This was hardly accomplished when the Conynghams and Constance arrived in the summer-house.

They were hot and breathless with their run, and all sat down on the seat to rest, Edred swinging his legs backwards and forwards with such energy that Alice, catching sight of his boots from her hiding-place, felt thankful that she was not under the seat. She certainly would have received more kicks than would have been pleasant.

The children soon began to talk.

'But what is she like, Eva?' said Constance; 'I should so like to see her.'

'Well! she must be somewhere in the square,' answered Eva, 'so I will show her to you presently; but there's nothing very very odd about her, except that she stands and stares so. Isn't it funny that she should wander about all alone? She's got no mother, or governess, or anybody with her.'

'Perhaps she's mad,' suggested Constance.

'She may be,' said Eva, 'only she doesn't look mad. It's only that she stares so.'

'Perhaps she's an idiot,' said Constance. 'I saw an idiot once who stared horribly. Does her tongue hang out?'

'Oh no,' answered Eva; 'she's quite like anybody else, if it wasn't for the staring. She's rather like you, Constance; she's got the same sort of

eyes. She's a pretty little girl, I think, and doesn't look a bit silly ; I think she's only rude.'

I think she's a ghost,' laughed Edred, 'for she came up to us so softly that we didn't hear her till she was quite close, and now she's disappeared so quick that I think she must have melted into air.'

'Eva, what's a ghost?' asked the small boy, rather fearfully.

'Oh, it's only nonsense, Harry darling, there isn't really such a thing in the world. Edred,' concluded Eva, in a lower voice, 'you shouldn't talk about ghosts and rubbish before Harry. Mamma told you not.'

'Well,' persisted Edred, 'I always thought them all nonsense till to-day ; but when a little girl disappears before your very eyes, and you don't even hear a gate bang, I—— Hark ! what's that ?'

Little Harry almost screamed, and all the other children started up, but they heard nothing.

'Oh, Edred, I wish you wouldn't make one jump so !' exclaimed Eva, 'and you've frightened poor Harry.'

'It's all very well,' laughed Edred, 'but it made me jump, too.'

'What was it you heard ?' asked Constance.

'It was a sort of rustle outside the summer-house, and a sort of noise like somebody crying or breathing very hard. Listen ! there it is again.'

'Oh, nonsense,' said Eva ; 'it's only the wind in the trees. Let's talk about something else ; Harry's

getting quite white. Would you like to go back to mademoiselle, Harry dear ?

Harry gladly caught at any means of escape from the land of terrors in which he had been an unwilling sojourner for the last few minutes, and Eva took him by the hand and led him away.

‘I’ll be back in a minute,’ she said.

‘I suppose you’re all deaf?’ resumed Edred, when Harry was gone, ‘for I know I heard the noise twice. I’ve a great mind to look all round the summer-house to see what it is. I certainly shall, too, if I hear it again.’

‘Have you ever seen this little girl before?’ asked Constance.

‘Yes, this morning; when we were playing on the beach she came and stood staring at us like she did just now, and at last she rushed up to Eva, and asked her if she might help to storm the castle. Wasn’t it funny?’

But Constance didn’t answer, and seemed to be turning something over in her mind, for she looked puzzled.

‘What are you thinking about?’ asked Edred.

‘I’m thinking about what you said,’ she answered; and then she added, half to herself, ‘it *must* be Alice.’

‘Who’s Alice?’ inquired he.

‘Why, Alice, my sister.’

‘Your sister?’ exclaimed Edred, opening his eyes very wide.

‘If it’s the same who spoke to you on the beach

to-day, it must be Alice,' began Constance, and then she stopped, and seemed rather bored at having said so much.

But Edred was not at all inclined to let the subject drop.

'Was it Alice who asked Eva to let her play with us this morning?' he inquired, astonished.

Constance hesitated for a minute, and then said, 'Yes.'

'Why didn't you tell us so before?' said Edred, dismayed.

'I didn't like to tell tales,' said Constance, simply.

Edred remained in a state of such bewilderment and surprise that he didn't speak for some minutes; and then he suddenly burst out laughing:—

'And we've been calling her mad, and a ghost, and all sorts of things. Why, you called her an idiot, yourself, Constance. You asked if her tongue hung out! Your own sister!'

And Edred was so tickled at the idea, that he rolled about the summer-house, convulsed.

'Oh, let's come and tell Eva. She *will* be so surprised!'

So saying, he bounded out of the summer-house, and ran across the grass towards his sister, followed by Constance.

We must now return to Alice, whom we left squeezed up in a little corner outside the arbour.

Poor child! she had indeed had a sorry time of

it during the children's conversation, every word of which she had, of course, overheard.

To begin with, she was most uncomfortable, for her attitude was such a cramped one, that her legs soon got quite stiff, and so did her back and shoulders. Yet she did not dare move, for fear of being discovered. Once or twice she had tried to shift her position a little, for the discomfort amounted almost to pain; but each time she had attracted Edred's attention, and had at last been obliged to give it up.

When they first began to talk about her, her pride had been sadly wounded to find she was considered an odd little girl, who wandered about alone and stared; but when it came to being called mad, and an idiot, and to hear her own sister ask if her tongue hung out, she could not stand it.

Hot tears of mortification rose to her eyes, and, as the conversation went on, ran down her cheeks; till, in spite of all her efforts to keep it back, a sob escaped her, and, as we have seen, attracted the attention of the children in the arbour. Her heart beat loudly when she heard Edred announce his intention of searching all round the summer-house if he heard the noise again; and with all her might she struggled to keep her sobs down, lest he should carry his threat into execution.

It was almost more than she could manage, however, and she certainly would not have lasted much longer without betraying herself, had it not been

for Edred and Constance's sudden exit from the harbour, in search of Eva.

Then, with one bound, Alice sprang from her hiding-place, struggled through the gap, and dashed away through the summer-house out into the square, flying across the grass to the gate as fast as her legs could carry her.

The pent-up tears burst forth as she ran, for she could restrain them no longer. She was close to the gate, when, to her dismay, she heard shouts behind her, and glancing hurriedly round, she saw the three little Conynghams and Constance in full pursuit.

They were calling to her as they came, and Constance was begging her to stop; but to Alice's excited ear they seemed to be jeering and laughing; and she ran on faster than ever, sobbing and crying as she went. Fortunately for her the gate was open, and she dashed through it, giving it a tremendous bang behind her, to prevent the others following.

Into the road she ran, without looking to the right hand or the left, and without perceiving that a carriage was coming rapidly up the road.

The coachman, seeing her danger, called out loudly to her to get out of the way; and Alice, startled and confused, lost her footing, and fell down right under the horses' hoofs.

There were shouts from the passers-by, screams from the children at the gate; the horses were pulled back upon their haunches; and a gentleman,

leaping from the carriage, lifted Alice up in his arms and carried her into the house. It was Mr. Fielding. It all happened so quickly that Alice had not time to be frightened, only very bewildered ; and she could not think why her father laid her so carefully down upon the sofa, and asked in such an anxious voice if she was much hurt ; calling her his darling, his poor child, over and over again.

She forgot what a pitiable object she was, with her face swollen and stained with crying, and the tears still standing on her cheeks ; her forehead and hands scratched and bleeding, and her hair all in disorder.

It was no wonder that Mr. Fielding thought the horses must have stepped upon her, or that she must have been injured by her fall on the stones.

It was in vain that Alice assured him she was not hurt at all ; and he was not the least convinced when Mrs. Fielding came breathlessly in, followed by Mrs. Conyngham and Miller, and they made even more fuss over Alice than he had done: all refusing to believe her repeated assurances.

No one could feel satisfied that she was not in some way injured, so long as the tears and scratches were unaccounted for, and Alice felt ashamed to explain before so many people.

‘Mamma,’ she whispered, trying to pull her mother down to the sofa, ‘if you will send them away, I will tell you all about it.’

So Mr. Fielding and Mrs. Conyngham very good-

naturedly went into the next room, and Miller betook herself upstairs.

Then, when she was left alone with her mother, Alice told the whole story, from beginning to end.

Mrs. Fielding listened with great interest, and when it was quite done she got up, and giving Alice a kiss, she moved to the door, saying :

‘We will talk it all over presently, but I must go now and tell the story to your father and the others. I will come back directly. Why, what is the matter, darling?’

For Alice was blushing up to her hair.

‘Oh, mamma! must you really? *Must* you tell the little Conynghams?’

‘I think it is only fair, dear; the poor little things were frightened to death at seeing you fall on the road, and it is due to them and to their mother to explain that your tears did not arise from any pain or hurt caused by the accident.’

‘Come back quickly, mamma,’ was all Alice said on hearing this, and her mother promised not to be long.

In about ten minutes she returned. ‘Alice,’ she said, smiling, ‘Mrs. Conyngham and her children have sent you an especial message to say how glad they all are to hear you were not hurt; and to say they hope that, as soon as you are sufficiently rested, you will join them in the square, and return with them to tea afterwards.’

‘Oh, mamma,’ said Alice, blushing crimson, ‘I would much rather not. Please say no. I couldn’t, really.’

‘And yet this time yesterday you would have thought it the height of happiness to receive such an invitation from the “fair-haired children with the indian-rubber ball.”’

‘Oh, yes, mamma ; but everything is changed since then. I shouldn’t like it now.’

‘What has changed, dear ?’

‘Oh, everything ; the day, and the square, and everything.’

‘I see no difference, Alice. The day is as lovely, the sea is as calm, the square is as gay, and the games going on as merrily as ever.’

Alice fidgeted with her handkerchief, and muttered something about the children.

‘What! the little Conynghams? I think you are mistaken. From the window where I sit, I see them playing with their indian-rubber ball, looking as happy and pretty as they did yesterday. Try again, Alice. What is it that has changed?’

But as Alice was silent, Mrs. Fielding went on. ‘Did you ever hear, my child, of a beautiful garden in the far east, where all was bright and lovely, and where two happy beings dwelt in perfect happiness, with free permission from an all-bountiful Creator to use and enjoy to the full all that surrounded them, save one thing?’

‘You mean the Garden of Eden, mamma.’

‘I do. And now, can you tell me what changed to them the aspect of everything, and turned all their joy into misery?’

‘Yes, mamma : they disobeyed.’

'Exactly. Disobedience, or in other words, sin, converted that lovely garden into a place of sadness, and took away all their enjoyment in it.'

'Yes, everything changed.'

'But, tell me, *what* changed ?'

'Oh, everything, mamma ; *everything*.'

'How do you mean, *everything* ? Did the flowers lose their beauty, and the birds cease their song ? Did the light turn into darkness, and the trees wither and die ?'

'Well, no, mamma, not exactly that. I suppose it was all really the same, only it *seemed* so different to Adam and Eve.'

'And why did it seem different ?'

'I think it was because they felt so different themselves.'

'Exactly, Alice. *They* were changed. To them all seemed different, for the *power* of enjoyment was gone. They could not find fault with the beautiful garden itself, though they looked upon it with different eyes. The fault was in themselves, not in God's bright world. And now, Alice, do you see why I told this story ?'

Perhaps Alice did not, altogether, but the rising blush on her cheek betrayed that she had a faint suspicion of the reason.

Mrs. Fielding did not press her to answer. She waited a minute to see if Alice was going to speak, and then went on :

'When you first went into the square, yesterday, and on the beach this morning, you were, like

Adam and Eve, surrounded by every outward enjoyment you could desire. Bright sun, blue skies, soft summer breezes, with health and strength to enjoy all. You had, like them, free permission to use and enjoy everything around you but one thing. And now you say all is altered—the day, and the square, and everything. Yet, as I tell you, there is no real difference. The outward world is as bright as it was yesterday. It is *you*, Alice, who, like Adam and Eve, look upon it all with different eyes. To you all *seems* changed, because you feel different yourself. The bright sea-shore and green grass seem no more different from what they were yesterday and this morning to the happy children playing there, than did the outward aspect of the Garden of Eden after the fall to the happy angels. To Adam and Eve alone did it appear altered. You told me, Alice, what wrought the change to them. Now tell me what has wrought the change to you.'

But Alice's only answer was to hide her face on her mother's shoulder; and Mrs. Fielding, kissing her fondly, whispered, 'You see, don't you, darling, that it was the same thing—disobedience, or in other words, sin. You cannot, any more than Adam and Eve could, find fault with the outward world, or with the poor little Conynghams. The fault lies in yourself, not in them. The pleasure of their society, which yesterday you desired so ardently, has been converted almost into pain. You shrink from it now almost as much as you

longed for it then. Yet they are not to blame, only you. Ah, Alice, it is often so. We mar the innocent enjoyments of this world by our own sin, and then we blame the world instead of blaming ourselves. Try and remember the lesson you have learnt to-day; it will be useful to you all your life. And do not forget, in your prayers to-night, to thank God for sending His Son to save Adam and Eve, and you and I, and all mankind, from the penalties of sin and disobedience.

‘And now, come up with me into my room,’ she concluded, rising from her chair, ‘and let us see what Miller can do towards restoring that poor scratched face and tangled hair of yours to a little order : then I will take you into the square to meet the little Conynghams. You will not be shy if I come with you, will you, dear ? I assure you they will receive you as if nothing had happened, and I promise you you will find them quite as nice, if not nicer, than you fancied them when you first saw them.’

Alice followed her mother upstairs into her room, where they found Miller waiting, and Alice’s Indian silk suit and white hat with the blue feather spread out on the bed.

Alice submitted herself very humbly into Miller’s hands, after glancing hastily at her face to see if she looked triumphant at her having to end in doing what she had so obstinately refused to do before. But Miller’s face wore an expression of such beaming happiness and kindness that Alice

felt ashamed of having suspected her, and even took occasion to whisper in Miller's ear that she was sorry she had been so tiresome.

'Never think of it again, miss,' was Miller's hearty response; 'I'm too glad to see you safe and well to care anything about it.'

Which answer rather puzzled Alice, till she remembered her fall on the road, and then she saw that Miller was referring to that.

The fact was, poor Miller, attracted by the violent banging of the square-gate, had come to the window just in time to see Alice dash in front of the carriage and fall under the horses.

'Well! you look a little more respectable now, in spite of a scratch here and there,' said Mrs. Fielding, smiling. 'Go into the drawing-room for a minute on your way down, and show yourself to your papa. He is not quite happy about you yet. After that we will start.'

Alice ran in to her father, who was delighted to see her looking like herself once more; and he kissed her many times, telling her how frightened he had been to see her lying on the ground, apparently bruised and hurt.

As soon as Alice found herself in the square with her mother, she felt all her shyness returning, particularly when, at sight of her, the three little Conynghams and Constance left their game, and came rushing to meet her.

Before she had time to feel how disagreeable her position was, they were all round her, some kissing

her, some holding her hand, and all at once telling her how glad, how very glad they were that she was not hurt ; how *dreadfully* frightened they had been when they saw her fall ; and how sorry they were for all that had gone before, and for not having recognised her as Constance's sister.

Alice felt quite confused as she turned from one to the other, and tried to answer what each one said ; but her eyes beamed with pleasure at their rapturous greeting, and at once all feelings of shyness fled away, and they never returned.

In a very little while she was first and foremost in a most energetic game with the indian-rubber ball ; and no step was fleetier, no laugh merrier than hers.

The little Conynghams proved all, and more, than her wildest expectations had imagined ; and in many a happy game in the square, and merry storming of castles on the sand, did they try to wipe out the recollection of that unfortunate day.

But though it gradually grew dim in Alice's mind, she never really forgot it. She never cared to talk about it, nor would she laugh over its events, nor turn it all into a joke, as Edred once or twice attempted to do.

Whenever that afternoon *did* recur to her mind, it was not to think over her half-hour outside the summer-house as a ridiculous adventurer, nor to recall how funny it was that her own sister should have suggested that she was an idiot, and have asked whether her tongue hung out.

No! she looked upon it all in a more serious light; and when she thought it over, it helped her to see for herself what her mother had tried to explain to her by the parallel of the history of Adam and Eve, namely, that sin changes the aspect of everything, however fair and innocent.

She saw how, in her case, wrong-doing had been its own punishment; and how what had seemed so desirable to her before she disobeyed had turned into disappointment and worthlessness when within her grasp, through her own fault.

Not that the thing wished for was in any way less desirable than she had imagined; but that 'to a disordered mind all things are out of course.'

And she never afterwards read the history of the Fall without thinking of her own lesson of obedience.

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